









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation



LIFE OF GOETHE







GOETHE. BY STIELER.

[*Frontispiece.*]

# LIFE OF GOETHE

BY P. HUME BROWN, F.B.A., LL.D.

HISTORIOGRAPHER ROYAL FOR SCOTLAND AND PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT SCOTTISH  
HISTORY AND PALAEOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE  
BY VISCOUNT HALDANE

VOL. I.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1920



## PREFATORY NOTE

PROFESSOR HUME BROWN died in the winter of 1918. He had nearly completed his *Life of Goethe*. The earlier part, *The Youth of Goethe*, had already been published in 1913. The larger part, however, to which I have given the title *The Later Years of Goethe*, existed only in manuscript. But it was ready to be revised for the press, with the exception of Chapter XXIII., in which the author intended to deal with the Second Part of *Faust*. Professor Hume Brown died before he could touch this, and all that he left of material consisted of a few notes. I have ventured, however, to write and insert this Chapter as it now appears. I felt justified in doing so, even though I could not be sure that he might not have expressed what it contains in a somewhat different fashion. For he and I had talked over the poem during many years, and we had, both of us, studied it fairly closely. It was our practice to go to Germany annually to collect materials for a life of Goethe, and this we had done in each year from 1898 to 1912 inclusive. We spent our time mainly in Weimar, Ilmenau, Jena, Wetzlar and Göttingen, and we had accumulated a good deal of material. There was hardly a book or article of importance which the Professor did not in the result possess, and we spent much

time each autumn in Scotland in going over his manuscript as it grew in his hands.

If this had not been so, I should not have felt at liberty to add to what he left, particularly as the Second Part of *Faust* was a subject which had occasioned him much thought and difficulty. Whether he would have accepted everything I have tried to say, or have been satisfied with the words in which I have expressed it, I do not know, but I am pretty confident that I have been of one mind with him in the interpretation of the poem.

The revision of the rest of the book is partly the work of my sister. With her, also, he had discussed his plan fully, and she knew his point of view thoroughly. In undertaking to prepare the manuscript for the press she had thus advantages which only she and I, who knew our friend's mind so well, could possess.

But we both feel that, although our labour has been one of devotion to his memory, the public has suffered by the author's premature death. For he alone could have put the finishing touches to a piece of work for which he was uniquely equipped. To write this *Life of Goethe* had long been his ambition, and he had put into the execution of his task the closest consideration and the most extended research. Goethe was his favourite teacher as well as his favourite poet, and his ambition was to try to make the greatness of the man clear to the Anglo-Saxon world.

When he felt his strength beginning to fail, he entrusted to us the publication of this book, and we have sought to fulfil his dying wishes, faithfully, and as best we could.



It remains for me to add that we have been much assisted in the work of revision by two personal friends of Professor Hume Brown, whose judgment he held in high esteem. One of these is Dr. George Macdonald, Fellow of the British Academy, whose revision of the text has been inspired, not only by his knowledge of literature, but by his affection for the author. The other is Dr. Otto Schlapp, Lecturer on German Literature in the University of Edinburgh, who was not merely a colleague of Professor Hume Brown, but a friend on whose great knowledge of his subject the Professor set high store. To these collaborators we tender our thanks for many suggestions which have been made use of in editing both of these volumes.

I may mention that the mask of Goethe, reproduced in the second volume from a photograph, was made by Weisser in October, 1807. The mask itself belonged to Professor Hume Brown, to whom it was bequeathed by the late Professor Masson. It was given to the latter by Thomas Carlyle, who in his turn had received it from Goethe's family. Professor Hume Brown left it by his will to the University of Edinburgh, where it now is.

HALDANE.



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT, 1749-1765 . . .	1
II. STUDENT IN LEIPZIG, OCTOBER, 1765—SEPTEMBER, 1768	21
III. AT HOME IN FRANKFORT, SEPTEMBER, 1768—APRIL, 1770	42
IV. GOETHE IN STRASSBURG, APRIL, 1770—AUGUST, 1771 .	54
V. FRANKFORT— <i>GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN</i> , AUGUST, 1771— DECEMBER, 1771 . . . . .	80
VI. INFLUENCE OF MERCK AND THE DARMSTADT CIRCLE, 1772 . . . . .	97
VII. WETZLAR AND CHARLOTTE BUFF, MAY—SEPTEMBER, 1772 . . . . .	105
VIII. AFTER WETZLAR, 1772-1773 . . . . .	113
IX. SATIRICAL DRAMAS AND FRAGMENTS . . . . .	120
X. <i>WERTHER</i> AND <i>CLAVIGO</i> , 1774 . . . . .	136
XI. GOETHE AND SPINOZA— <i>DER EWIGE JUDE</i> , 1773-4 .	154
XII. GOETHE IN SOCIETY, 1774 . . . . .	161
XIII. LILI SCHÖNEMANN, 1775 . . . . .	181
XIV. LAST MONTHS IN FRANKFORT— <i>THE URFAUST</i> , 1775 .	206
XV. FIRST MONTHS IN WEIMAR, NOVEMBER, 1775—JUNE, 1776 . . . . .	218
XVI. GOETHE AS COUNCILLOR OF LEGATION, 1776-1779 .	237
XVII. GOETHE AS PRIVY COUNCILLOR, AUGUST, 1779—JUNE, 1782 . . . . .	254

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF FINANCE, JUNE, 1782 —SEPTEMBER, 1786 . . . . .	266
XIX. LITERARY PRODUCTION DURING THE FIRST WEIMAR PERIOD . . . . .	286
XX. THE ITALIAN JOURNEY, 1786-1788 . . . . .	321
XXI. <i>EGMONT, IPHIGENIE, AND TASSO</i> . . . . .	347
XXII. FRAU VON STEIN—CHRISTIANE VULPIUS—THE <i>ROMAN</i> <i>ELEGIES</i> , 1788-1789 . . . . .	377

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	TO FACE PAGE
GOETHE. BY STIELER . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
GOETHE'S FATHER AND MOTHER . . . . .	6
PORTRAIT OF FRAU VON STEIN . . . . .	230
PORTRAIT OF FRAU V. STEIN (REPUTED) . . . . .	234
GOETHE ON THE GICKELHAIN IN 1831, ON THE SPOT WHERE HE HAD WRITTEN "UEBER ALLEN GIPFELN" . . . . .	240
GOETHE IN THE ROMAN CAMPAGNA. BY TISCHBEIN (1787). . . . .	328



# LIFE OF GOETHE

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

1749—1765

IN his seventy-fifth year Goethe remarked to his secretary, Eckermann, that he had always been regarded as one of fortune's chiefest favourites, and he admitted the general truth of the impression, though with significant reserves. "In truth," he added, "there has been nothing but toil and trouble, and I can affirm that throughout my seventy-five years I have not had a month's real freedom from care."<sup>1</sup> Goethe's biographers are generally agreed that his good fortune began with his birth, and that the circumstances of his childhood and boyhood were eminently favourable for his future development. Yet Goethe himself apparently did not, in his reserves, make an exception even in favour of these early years; and, as we shall see, we have other evidence from his own hand that these years were not years of unmingled happiness and of entirely auspicious augury.

In one circumstance, at least, Goethe appears to have considered himself well treated by destiny. From the vivid and sympathetic description he has given of his native city of Frankfort-on-the-Main we may infer that he considered himself fortunate in the place of his birth.<sup>2</sup> It is concurrent testimony

<sup>1</sup> *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, January 27, 1824.

<sup>2</sup> In 1792, on the occasion of his being offered the honour of *Rathsherr* (town-councillor) in Frankfort, he wrote to his mother that "it was an



## 2 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

that, at the date of Goethe's birth, no German city could have offered greater advantages for the early discipline of one who was to be Germany's national poet. Its situation was central, standing as it did on the border line between North and South Germany. No German city had a more impressive historic past, the memorials of which were visible in imposing architectural remains, in customs, and institutions. It was in Frankfort that for generations the German Emperors had received their crowns; and the spectacle of one of these ceremonies remained a vivid memory in Goethe's mind throughout his long life. For the man Goethe the actual present counted for more than the most venerable past;<sup>1</sup> and, as a boy, he saw in Frankfort not only the reminders of former generations, but the bustling activities of a modern society. The spring and autumn fairs brought traders from all parts of Germany and from the neighbouring countries; and ships from every part of the globe deposited their miscellaneous cargoes on the banks of the river Main. In the town itself there were sights fitted to stir youthful imagination; and the surrounding country presented a prospect of richness and variety in striking contrast to the tame environs of Goethe's future home in Weimar. Dr. Arnold used to say that he knew from his pupils' essays whether they had seen London or the sea, because the sight of either of these objects seemed to suggest a new measure of things. Frankfort, with its 30,000 inhabitants, with its past memories and its bustling present, was at least on a sufficient scale to suggest the conception of a great society developing its life under modern conditions. For Goethe, who

honour, not only in the eyes of Europe, but of the whole world, to have been a citizen of Frankfort." (Goethe to his mother, December 24, 1792.) So, in 1824, he told Bettina von Arnim that, had he had the choice of his birthplace, he would have chosen Frankfort. As we shall see, Goethe did not always speak so favourably of Frankfort.

<sup>1</sup> Die Abgeschiednen betracht' ich gern,  
Stünd' ihr Verdienst auch noch so fern;  
Doch mit den edlen lebendigen Neuen  
Mag ich wetteifernd mich lieber freuen.



was to pass most of his days in a town of some 7000 inhabitants, and to whom no form of human activity was indifferent, it was a fortunate destiny that he did not, like Herder, pass his most receptive years in a petty village remote from the movements of the great world.<sup>1</sup> In these years he was able to accumulate a store of observations and experiences which laid a solid foundation for all his future thinking.

If Goethe was fortunate in the place of his birth, was he equally fortunate in its date (1749)? He has himself given the most explicit of answers to the question. In a remarkable paper, written at the age of forty-six, he has described the conditions under which he and his contemporaries produced their works in the different departments of literature. The paper had been called forth by a violent and coarse attack, which he described as *literarischer Sansculottismus*, on the writers of the period; and with a testiness unusual with him he took up their defence. Under what conditions, he asks, do classical writers appear? Only, he answers, when they are members of a great nation and when great events are moving that nation at a period in its history when a high state of culture has been reached by the body of its people. Only then can the writer be adequately inspired and find to his hand the materials requisite for the production of works of permanent value. But, at the epoch when he and his contemporaries entered on their career, none of these conditions existed. There was no German nation, there was no standard of taste, no educated public opinion, no recognized models for imitation; and in these circumstances Goethe finds the explanation of the shortcomings of the generation of writers to which he belonged.

On the truth of these conclusions Goethe's adventures as a literary artist are the all-sufficient commentary. From first to last he was in search

<sup>1</sup> In his later years Goethe preferred life in a small town. "Zwar ist es meiner Natur gemäss, an einem kleinen Orte zu leben." (Goethe to Zelter, December 16, 1804.)

#### 4 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

of adequate literary forms and of worthy subjects ; and, as he himself admits, he not unfrequently went astray in the quest. On his own word, therefore, we may take it that under other conditions he might have produced more perfect works than he has actually given us. Yet the world has had its compensations from these hampering conditions under which his creative powers were exercised. In the very attempt to grope his way to the most expressive forms of artistic presentation all the resources of his mind found their fullest play. It is in the variety of his literary product, unparalleled in the case of any other poet, that lies its inexhaustible interest ; between *Götz von Berlichingen* and the Second Part of *Faust* what a range of themes and forms does he present for his readers' appreciation ! And to the anarchy of taste and judgment that prevailed when he began his literary career we in great measure owe another product of his manifold activities. He has been denied a place in the very first rank of poets, but by the best judges he is regarded as the greatest master of literary and artistic criticism. But, had he found fixed and acknowledged standards in German national literature and art, there would have been less occasion for his searching scrutiny of the principles which determine all art and literature. As it was, he was led from the first to direct his thoughts to the consideration of these principles ; and the result is a body of reflections, marking every stage of his own development, on life, literature, and art, which, in the opinion of critics like Edmond Scherer and Matthew Arnold, gave him his highest claim to the consideration of posterity.

As human lot goes, Goethe was fortunate in his home and his home relations, though in the case of both there were disadvantages which left their mark on him throughout his later life. He was born in the middle-class, the position which, according to Schiller, is most favourable for viewing mankind as a whole, and therefore advantageous for a poet who,

like Goethe, was open to universal impressions. Though his maternal grandfather was chief magistrate of Frankfort, and his father was an Imperial Councillor, the family did not belong to the *élite* of the city; Goethe, brilliant youth of genius though he was, was not regarded as an eligible match for the daughter of a Frankfort banker. It was the father who was the dominating figure in the home life of the family; and the relations between father and son emphasize the fact that the early influences under which the son grew up left something to be desired. Their permanent mutual attitude was misunderstanding, resulting from imperfect sympathy. "If"—so wrote Goethe in his sixty-fourth year regarding his father and himself—"if, on his part as well as on the son's, a suggestion of mutual understanding had entered into our relationship, much might have been spared to us both. But that was not to be!" It is with dutiful respect but with no touch of filial affection that Goethe has drawn his father's portrait in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. As the father is there depicted, he is the embodiment of Goethe's own definition of a Philistine—one naturally incapable of entering into the views of other people.<sup>1</sup> Yet Goethe might have had a worse parent; for, according to his lights, the father spared no pains to make his son an ornament of his generation. Strictly conscientious, methodical, with a genuine love of art and letters, he did his best to furnish his son with every accomplishment requisite to distinction in the walk of life for which he destined him—the profession of law, in which he had himself failed through the defects of his temperament. Directly and indirectly, he personally took in hand his son's instruction, but without appreciation or consideration of the affinities of a mind with precociously developed instincts. The natural result of the father's pedantic solicitude was that his

<sup>1</sup> To Chancellor von Müller Goethe said: "Mein Vater war ein tüchtiger Mann, aber freilich fehlte ihm Gewandtheit und Beweglichkeit des Geistes."



## 6 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

son came to see in him the schoolmaster rather than the parent. Knowledge in abundance was conveyed, but of the moulding influence of parental sympathy there was none. What dubious consequences followed from these relations of father and son we shall afterwards see.

Goethe's mother has found a place in German hearts which is partly due to the portrait which her son has drawn of her, but still more to the impression conveyed by her own recorded sayings and correspondence. Goethe's tone, when he speaks of his father, is always cool and critical; of his mother, on the other hand, he speaks with the feelings of a grateful son, conscious of the deep debt he owed to her.<sup>1</sup> His relations to her in his later years have exposed him to severe animadversion, but their intercourse in these early years presents the most attractive chapter in the record of his private life. Married at the age of seventeen to a husband approaching forty, the mother, as she herself said, stood to her children rather as an elder sister than as a parent. And her own character made this relation a natural one. An overflowing vitality, a lively and never-failing interest in all the details of daily life, and a temperament responsive to every call, kept her perennially young, and fitted her to be the companion of her children rather than the sober helpmate of such a husband as Herr Goethe.<sup>2</sup> How, by her faculty of story-telling, she ministered to that side of her son's nature which he had inherited from herself Goethe has related with grateful appreciation. But he owed her a larger debt. It was her spirit pervading the household that brought into his early home life such happiness as fell to his lot. A commonplace mother and a prosaic father would have created an atmosphere which, in the case of a

<sup>1</sup> Writing to her grandchild, Goethe's mother says: "Dein lieber Vater hat mir nie Kummer oder Verdruss verursacht."

<sup>2</sup> When the son of Frau von Stein was about to visit her, Goethe wrote: "Da sie nicht so ernsthaft ist wie ich, so wirst du dich besser bei ihr befinden."



GOETHE'S FATHER.



GOETHE'S MOTHER.



child with Goethe's impressionable nature, would permanently have affected his outlook on life. For the future poet, the mother was an admirable nurse; she fed his fancy with her own; she taught him the art of making the most of life—a lesson which he never forgot; and she gave him her own sane and cheerful view of the uncontrollable element in human destiny. For the future man, however, we may doubt whether she was the best of mothers. Her education was meagre—a defect which her conscientious husband did his best to amend; and all her characteristics were fitted rather to evoke affection than to inspire respect. Though her son always speaks of her with tender regard, his tone is that of an elder brother to a sister rather than of a son to a parent. She was herself conscious of her incompetence to discharge all the responsibilities of a mother, which the character of the father made specially onerous. "We were young together," she said of herself and her son, and she confessed frankly that "she could educate no child." Thus, between an unsympathetic father and a mother incapable of influencing the deeper springs of character, Goethe passed through childhood and boyhood without the discipline of temper and will which only the home can give. And the lack of this discipline is traceable in all his actions till he had reached middle life. Wayward and impulsive by nature, he yielded to every motive, whether prompted by the intellect or by the heart, with an abandonment which struck his friends as the leading trait of his character. "Goethe," wrote one of them, "only follows his last notion, without troubling himself as to consequences," and of himself, when he was past his thirtieth year, he said that he was "as much a child as ever."

There was another member of the family of whom Goethe speaks with even warmer feeling than of his mother. This was his sister Cornelia, a year younger than himself, and destined to an unhappy marriage and an early death. Of the many portraits he has



drawn in his Autobiography, none is touched with a tenderer hand and with subtler sympathy than that of Cornelia. Goethe does not imply that she permanently influenced his future development; for such influence she possessed neither the force of mind nor the character.<sup>1</sup> But to her even more than to his mother he came to owe such home happiness as he enjoyed in the hours of freedom from the father's pedagogic discipline. She was his companion alike in his daily school tasks and in his self-sought pleasures—the confidant and sharer of all his boyish troubles. To no other person throughout his long life did Goethe ever stand in relations which give such a favourable impression of his heart as his relation with Cornelia. The memory of her was the dearest which he retained of his early days; and the words in which he recalls her in his old age prove that she was an abiding memory to the end.

It was an advantage on which Goethe lays special stress that, outside his somewhat cramping home-circle, he had a more or less intimate acquaintance with a number of persons, who by their different characters and accomplishments made lasting impressions on his youthful mind. The impressions must have been deep, since, writing in advanced age, he describes their personal appearance and their different idiosyncrasies with a minuteness which is at the same time a remarkable testimony to his precocious powers of observation. What is interesting in these intimacies as throwing light on Goethe's early characteristics is, that all these persons were of mature age, and all of them more or less eccentric in their habits and ways of thinking. "Even in God I discover defects," was the remark of one of them to his youthful listener—to whom he had been communicating his views on the world in general. In the company of these

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's letters addressed to Cornelia from Leipzig, when he was in his eighteenth year, are in the tone at once of an affectionate brother and of a schoolmaster. Their subsequent relations to each other will appear in the sequel.



elders, with such or kindred opinions, Goethe was early familiarized with the variability of human judgments on fundamental questions. And he laid the experience to heart, for on no point in the conduct of life does he insist with greater emphasis than the folly of expecting others to think as ourselves.

The method of Goethe's education was not such as to compensate for the lack of moral discipline which has already been noted. With the exception of a brief interval, he received instruction at home, either directly from his father or from tutors under his superintendence. Thus he missed both the steady drill of school life and the influence of companions of his own age which might have made him more of a boy and less of a premature man.<sup>1</sup> It is Goethe's own expressed opinion that the object of education should be to foster tastes rather than to communicate knowledge. In this object, at least, his own education was perfectly successful; for the tastes which he acquired under his father's roof remained with him to the end. What strikes us in his course of study is its desultoriness and its comprehensiveness. At one time or another he gained an acquaintance with English, French, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He read widely in history, secular and sacred, and in the later stage of his early studies he took up law at the express desire of his father. It was the aim of his father's scheme of education that accomplishments should form an essential part of it. So his son was taught music, drawing, dancing, riding, and fencing. But there was another side to Goethe's early training which, in his case, deserves to be specially emphasized. A striking characteristic of his writings is the knowledge they display of the whole range of the manual arts, and this knowledge he owed to the circumstances of his home. His father, a virtuoso with the means of gratifying his taste, freely employed

<sup>1</sup> It was doubtless due to the absence of strict drill in his youth that Goethe, as he himself tells us, never acquired the art of punctuating his own writings.

## 10 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

artists of all kinds to execute designs of his own conception; and, as part of his son's education, entrusted him with the superintendence of his commissions. Thus, in accordance with modern ideas, were combined in Goethe's training the practical and the theoretical—a combination which is the distinguishing characteristic of his productive activity. Generally considered, we see that the course of his studies was such as in any circumstances he would himself have probably followed. Under no conditions would Goethe have been content to restrict himself to a narrow field of study and to give the necessary application for its complete mastery. As it was, the multiplicity of his studies supplied the foundation for the manifold productivity of his maturer years. In no branch of knowledge was he ever a complete master; he devoted a large part of his life to the study of Greek and Roman antiquity, yet he never acquired a scholar's knowledge of either Greek or Roman literature.<sup>1</sup> If on these subjects he has contributed many valuable reflections, it was due to the insight of genius which apprehends what passes the range of ordinary vision.

A striking fact in Goethe's account of his early years is the emphasis he lays on the religious side of his education. Judging from the length at which he treats the subject, indeed, we are bound to assume that in his own estimation religion was the most important element in his early training, and in the case of one who came eventually to be known as the "great Pagan" the fact is remarkable. Had he sat down to write the narrative of these years at an earlier period of his life—after his return, say, from his Italian journey—we may conceive that in his then anti-Christian spirit he would have put his early religious experiences in a somewhat different light, and would hardly have assigned to them the same importance. But, when he actually addressed himself to tell the story of his development, he had passed out of his

<sup>1</sup> Goethe said of himself that he had no "grammatical vein."

anti-Christian phase, and was fully convinced of the importance of religion in human culture. Regarding this portion of his Autobiography, as regarding others, we may have our doubts as to how far the record is coloured by his opinions when he wrote it. Yet, after every reserve, there can be no question that religion engaged both his intellect and his emotions as a boy; and the fact is conclusive proof that religious instincts were not left out of his nature.<sup>1</sup>

There was nothing in the influence of his home that was specially fitted to awaken religious feeling or to occasion abnormal spiritual experiences. In religion as in everything else the father was a formalist, and such religious views as he held were those of the *Aufklärung*, for which all forms of spiritual emotion were the folly of unreason. Religion was a permanent and sustaining influence in the life of Goethe's mother, but her religion consisted simply in a cheerful acquiescence in the decrees of Providence. Of the soul's trials and sorrows, as they are recorded in the annals of the religious life, her nature was incapable, and she was always perfectly at ease in Zion. By his mother, therefore, the son could not be deeply moved to concern regarding his spiritual welfare, nor to make religion the all-engrossing subject of his thoughts and affections. There was one friend of the family, indeed, the Fräulein von Klettenberg (the *Schöne Seele* of *Wilhelm Meister*), in whom Goethe saw the exemplar of the religious life in its more ecstatic manifestations, but her special influence on him belongs to a later date. In accordance with the family rule he regularly attended church, but the homilies to which he listened were not of a nature to quicken his religious feelings, while the doctrinal instruction he received at home he has himself described as "nothing but a dry kind of morality."

<sup>1</sup> With reference to what he says of his Biblical studies he wrote as follows to a correspondent (January 30, 1812): "Dass Sie meine asiatischen Weltanfänge so freundlich aufnehmen, ist mir von grossem Wert. Es schlingt sich die daher für mich gewonnene Kultur durch mein ganzes Leben. . . ."



## 12 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

Against one article of the creed taught him—the doctrine of original and inherited sin—all his instincts rebelled ; and the antipathy was so compact with all his later thinking that we may readily believe that it manifested 'itself' thus early. If we may accept his own account of his youthful religious experiences, he was already on the way to that *Ur-religion*, which was his maturest profession of faith, and which he held to be the faith of select minds in all stages of human history. Now, as at all periods of his life, it was the beneficent powers in nature that most deeply impressed him, and he records how in crude childish fashion he secretly reared an altar to these powers, though an unlucky accident in the oblation prevented him from repeating his act of worship.

Like other children, he was quick to see the inconsistency of the creed he was taught with the actual facts of experience. One event in his childhood, the earthquake of Lisbon, especially struck him as a confounding commentary on the accepted belief in the goodness of God ; and the impression was deepened when in the following summer a violent thunder-storm played havoc with some of the most treasured books in his father's library. In all his soul's troubles, however, Goethe, according to his own account, found refuge in a world where questionings of the ways of Providence had never found an entrance. In the Old Testament, and specially in the Book of Genesis, with its picture of patriarchal life, he found a world which by engaging his feelings and imagination worked with tranquillizing effect (*stille Wirkung*) on his spirit, distracted by his miscellaneous studies and his varied interests. Of all the elements that entered into his early culture, indeed, Goethe gives the first place to the Bible. "To it, almost alone," he expressly says, "did I owe my moral education." To the Bible as an incomparable presentment of the national life and development of a people, and the most precious of possessions for human culture, Goethe bore undeviating testimony

at every period of his life. It need hardly be said that his attitude towards the Bible was divided by an impassable gulf from the attitude of traditional Christianity. For Goethe it was a purely human production, the fortunate birth of a time and a race which in the nature of things can never be paralleled. What the Churches have read into it, was not for him its inherent virtue. Even in his youth it was in its picturesque presentation of a primitive life that he discovered what satisfied the needs of his nature. The spiritual aspirations of the Psalms, the moral indignation of the prophets, found no response in him either in youth or in manhood. His ideal of life was never that of the saints, but, as his record of his early religious experience shows, it was an ideal which had its roots in the nature which had been allotted him.

To certain events in his early life Goethe assigned a decisive influence on his future development. To the gift of a set of puppets by his grandmother he attributes his first awakened interest in the drama; and the extraordinary detail with which Wilhelm Meister describes his youthful absorption in the play of his puppets proves that in his Autobiography Goethe does not lay undue stress on the significance of the gift. To another event which occurred when he was entering his seventh year, he ascribes the origin of an attitude of mind which in his own opinion he did not overcome till his later years. In 1756 broke out the Seven Years' War, in the course of which there was a cleavage in German public opinion that disturbed the peace of families and set the nearest relatives at bitter feud. Such was the case in the Goethe circle—the father passionately sympathizing with Frederick; the maternal grandfather, Textor, the chief magistrate of Frankfort, as passionately taking the side of Maria Theresa. In this case the son's sympathies were those of his father, and in boyish fashion he made a hero of the king of Prussia, though, as he himself is careful to tell us, Prussia and its interests were nothing to him. It was to

## 14 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

the pain he felt when his hero was defamed by the supporters of Austria that he traced that contempt of public opinion which he notes as a characteristic of the greater part of his manhood. Yet we may doubt if any external event was needed to develop in him this special turn of mind. As his whole manner of thinking proves, it was neither in his character nor in his genius to make a popular appeal like a Burns or a Schiller.<sup>1</sup> In his old age Goethe said of himself that he was conscious of an innate feeling of aristocracy which made him regard himself as the peer of princes; and we need no further explanation of his contempt for public opinion. Yet if the worship of heroes has the moulding influence which Carlyle ascribed to it, in Goethe's youthful admiration of Frederick this influence could not be wanting. To the end Frederick appeared to him one of those "dæmonic" personalities, who from time to time cross the world's stage, and whose action is as incalculable as the phenomena of the natural world. "When such an one passes to his rest, how gladly would we be silent," were his memorable words when the news of Frederick's death reached him during his Italian travels, and the remark proves how deeply and permanently Frederick's career had impressed him.

More easily realized is the direct influence on Goethe's youthful development of another event of his boyhood. As a result of the Seven Years' War, 7000 French troops took possession of Frankfort in the beginning of 1759, and occupied it for more than three years. In the ways of a foreign soldiery at free quarters the Frankforters saw a strange contrast to their own decorous habits of life, but the French occupation was brought more directly home to the Goethe household. To the disgust and indignation of the father, to whom as a worshipper of Frederick the French were objects of detestation, their chief

<sup>1</sup> His remark to Eckermann (1828) is well known: "Meine Sachen können nicht populär werden; wer daran denkt und dafür strebt, ist in einem Irrthum."



officer, Count Thoranc, was quartered in his house. Goethe has told in detail the history of this invasion of the quiet household—the never-failing courtesy and considerateness of Thoranc, the abiding ill-humour of the father, the reconciling offices of the mother, exercised in vain to effect a mutual understanding between her husband and his unwelcome guest. As for Goethe himself, devoted to Frederick though he was, the presence of the French introduced him to a new world into which he entered with boyish delight. With the insatiable curiosity which was his characteristic throughout life, he threw himself into the pleasures and avocations of the novel society. Thoranc was a connoisseur in art, and gave frequent commissions to the artists of the town; and Goethe, already interested in art through his father's collections, found his opportunity in these tastes of Thoranc, who was struck by the boy's precocity and even took hints from his suggestions.

A theatre set up by the French was another source of pleasure and stimulus. The sight of the pieces that were acted prompted him to compose pieces of his own and led him to the study of the French classical drama. In the *coulisses*, to which he was admitted by special favour, he observed the ways of actors—an experience which supplied the materials for the portraiture of the actor's life in *Wilhelm Meister*. A remark which he makes in connection with the French theatre is a significant commentary on his respective relations to his father and mother, and indicates the atmosphere of evasion which permanently pervaded the household. It was against the will of his father, but with the connivance of his mother, that he paid his visits to the theatre and cultivated the society of the actors, and it was only by the consideration that his son's knowledge of French was thus improved that the practical father was reconciled to the delinquency. The direct results of his intercourse with the French soldiery on Goethe's development were at once abiding and of high

importance. It extended his knowledge of men and the world, and, more specifically, it gave him that interest in French culture and that insight into the French mind which he possessed in a degree beyond any of his contemporaries.

But the most notable experience of these early years under his father's roof still remains to be mentioned. When he was in his fourteenth year, Goethe fell in love—the first of the many similar experiences which were to form the successive crises of his future life. There can be little doubt that in his narrative of this his first love there is to the full as much “poetry” as “truth”; but there can also be as little doubt that all the circumstances attending it made his first love a turning-point in his life. It is a peculiarity of all Goethe's love adventures that between him and the successive objects of his affections there was always some bar which made a regular union impossible or undesirable. So it was in the case of the girl whom he calls Gretchen, and of whom we know nothing except what he chose to tell us. He made her acquaintance through his association with a set of youths of questionable character whom we are surprised to find as the chosen companions of the son of an Imperial Councillor. Of all Goethe's loves this was the one that was accompanied by the least pleasant complications and the most painful of disillusion. Through his intercourse with Gretchen he was led to recommend one of her intimates for a municipal post in Frankfort—a post which he did not hold long before he was found guilty of embezzlement and defalcation. The discovery was disastrous to Goethe's relations with Gretchen, and the disaster involved an experience of conflicting emotions which produced a crisis in his inner life. He had been rudely awakened to mistrust of mankind, and it was an awakening which, as he has himself emphasized, influenced all his thinking and feeling for many years to come. He had lived in a dream of phantasy and passion, and he learned to the shock



of his whole nature that the object of his dreams had never at any moment regarded him otherwise than as an interesting boy, whose talents and connections made him a desirable acquaintance. In the strained and morbid condition of his body and mind, which was the result of his disillusion, we see an experience which was often to be repeated in his maturer years, and which points to elements in his nature which were ever ready to pass beyond his control. As in the case of all his subsequent experiences of the same nature, he finally regained self-mastery, but a revolution had been accomplished in him as the result of the struggle. His boyhood was at an end, and it is with the consciousness of awakened manhood that he now looks out upon life. More than once in his future career a similar transformation was to be repeated—a great passion followed by a new direction of his activities, involving a saving breach with the past.

Goethe's father had determined from the beginning that his only son should follow the profession of law, in which, as we have seen, he had himself failed owing to his peculiarities of mind and temper. In this determination there was no consideration of the predilections of his son, and in this fact lay the permanent cause of their estrangement. The father's choice of a university for his son was another illustration of their divergent sympathies and interests. Left to his own choice, the son would have preferred the University of Göttingen as his place of study, but his father ruled that Leipzig, his own University, was the proper school for the future civilian. In connection with his departure for Leipzig Goethe makes two confessions which are a striking commentary on the conditions of his home life in Frankfort. He left Frankfort, he tells us, with joy as intense as that of a prisoner who has broken through his gaol window, and finds himself a free man. And this repugnance to his native city, as a place where he could not expand freely, remained an abiding feeling

## 18 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

with him. The bourgeois life of Frankfort, he wrote to his mother during his first years at Weimar, was intolerable to him, and to have made his permanent home there would have been fatal to the fulfilment of every ideal that gave life its value. His other confession is a still more significant illustration of the vital lack of sympathy between father and son. He left Frankfort, he says, with the deliberate intention of following his own predilections and of disregarding the express wish of his father that he should apply himself specifically to the study of law. Only his sister Cornelia was the confidant of his secret intention, and apparently no attempt was made to effect even a compromise between the aims of the father and those of the son. Plain and direct dealing was a marked characteristic of Goethe at every period of his life; that he should thus have deceived his father in a matter that lay nearest his heart is therefore the final proof that father and son were separated by a gulf which could not be bridged. As it was, in the course of life which Goethe was to follow in Leipzig we may detect a certain defiant heedlessness which points to an uneasy consciousness of duty ignored.

We have it on Goethe's own word that with his departure for Leipzig begins that self-directed development which he was to pursue with the undeviating purpose and the wonderful result which make him the unique figure he is in the history of the human spirit. What, we may inquire—as he is now at the commencement of a career unparalleled, so far as our knowledge goes, in the case of any other of the world's greatest spirits—what were the specific characteristics, visible in him from the first, which gave the pledge and promise of this astonishing career? In his case, we can say with certainty, was fully verified the adage, that the boy is father of the man. Alike in internal and in external traits we note in him as a boy characteristics which were equally marked in the mature man. In his demeanour, he himself tells us, there was a certain stiff dignity which excited the ridicule of his com-

panions. It was in his nature even as a boy, he also tells us, to assume airs of command : one of his own acquaintance and of his own years said of him, " We were all his lacqueys." Here we have in anticipation the aged Goethe whose Jove-like presence put Heine out of countenance ; the " god, cold, monosyllabic," of Jean Paul. But behind the stiff demeanour, in youth as in age, there was the mercurial temperament, the *etwas unendlich Rührendes*, which made him a problem at all periods of his life even to those who knew him most intimately. He has himself noted his youthful reputation for eccentricity, " his lively, impetuous, and excitable temper " ; and this was the side of him that most impressed his associates till he was past middle age. In boyhood, also, as in even his latest years, he was subject to bursts of violence in which he lost all self-control. When attacked by three of his schoolmates, he fell upon them with the fury of a wild beast, and mastered all three. On the loss of Gretchen he " wept and raved," and, as the result of his morbid sensibility, his constitution, always abnormally influenced by his emotions, was seriously impaired. Here we have the *Weiblichkeit*, the feminine strain in his nature, which was noted by Schiller, and which explains the shrinking from all forms of pain which he inherited from his mother.

More than once these emotional elements in his nature were to bring him near to moral shipwreck, and it was doubtless the consciousness of such a possibility in his own case that explains his haunting interest in the character and career of Byron. But underneath his " chameleon " temperament (the expression is his own<sup>1</sup>) there was a solid foundation, the lack of which was the ruin of Byron. Goethe has himself told us what this saving element in him was. It was a strenuousness and seriousness implanted in him by nature (*von der Natur in mich gelegter Ernst*), which, he says, " exerted its influence

<sup>1</sup> So Weislingen (in *Götz von Berlichingen*), whom Goethe meant to be a double of himself, says : " *Ich bin ein Chamaeleon.*"



## 20 EARLY YEARS IN FRANKFORT

[on him] at an early age, and showed itself more distinctly in after years." This side of his complex nature did not escape the notice even of his youthful contemporaries. "Goethe," wrote one of them from Leipzig, "is as great a philosopher as ever." Here again we see in the boy the father of the man. Increasingly, as the years went on, his innate tendency to reflection asserted itself, till at length in his latest period it so completely dominated him that the sage proved too much for the artist.

If the character of the boy foreshadowed that of the man, so did the tendencies of his genius the lines they were afterwards to follow. "Turn a man whither he will," he remarks in his Autobiography, "he will always return to the path marked out for him by nature," and his own development signally illustrates the truth of the remark. From his earliest youth, he tells us, he had "a passion for investigating natural things"; and towards middle life his interest in physical science became so absorbing as for many years to stifle his creative faculty. But in the retrospect of his life as a whole he had no doubt as to the supreme bent of his genius. The "laurel crown of the poet" was the goal of his youthful ambition, and the last bequest he made to posterity was the Second Part of *Faust*. Among the miscellaneous intellectual interests of his boyhood poetry evidently held the chief place, and, partly out of his own inspiration and partly at the suggestion of others, he diligently tried his hand at different forms of poetical composition. Yet, if we may judge from his most notable boyish piece—*Poetische Gedanken über die Höllenfahrt Jesu Christi*—there have been more "timely-happy spirits" than Goethe. Not, indeed, as we shall see, till his twentieth year, the age when, according to Kant, the lyric poet is in fullest possession of his genius, does his verse attain the distinctiveness of original creative power.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All Goethe's boyish productions that have been preserved will be found in *Der junge Goethe*, Neue Ausgabe in sechs Bänden besorgt von Max Morris, Leipzig, 1909.

## CHAPTER II

### STUDENT IN LEIPZIG

OCTOBER, 1765—SEPTEMBER, 1768

As we follow the life of Byron, it has been said, we seem to hear the gallop of horses,<sup>1</sup> and we are conscious of a similar tumult as we follow the career of Goethe from the day he entered Leipzig till the close of the "mad Weimar times," when he was approaching his thirtieth year. *Jugend ist Trunkenheit ohne Wein*, he says in his *West-östlicher Divan*, and, when he wrote the words, he may well have had specially in view the three whirling years he spent in Leipzig. "If one did not play some mad pranks in youth," he said on another occasion, "what would one have to think of in old age?" Assuredly during these Leipzig years Goethe played a sufficient number of pranks to supply him with materials for edifying retrospection.

Our difficulty in connection with these three years is to seize the essential lineaments in a character so full of contradictions that it eludes us at every turn and has presented to each of his many biographers a problem which each has sought to solve after his own fashion. Of materials for forming our conclusions there is certainly no lack. In his Autobiography he has related in detail, even to tediousness, the events and experiences of his life in Leipzig. Contemporary testimony, also, we have in abundance. We have the letters of friends who freely wrote their impressions of him, and from his own hand we have poems which record the passing feelings of the hour; we have two

<sup>1</sup> X. Doudan, *Melanges et Lettres*, i. 524.

plays which reveal moods and experiences more or less permanent; and above all we have a considerable number of his own letters addressed to his sister and different friends, all of which, it may be said, appear to give genuine expression to the promptings of the moment. The materials for forming our judgment, therefore, are even superabundant, but in their very multiplicity lies our difficulty. The narrative in the Autobiography doubtless gives a correct general outline of his life in Leipzig and of its main results for his general development, but its cool, detached tone leaves a totally inadequate impression of the froward youth, torn to distraction by conflicting passions and conflicting ideals. With the contemporary testimonies our difficulties are of another kind. The testimonies of his friends regarding his personal traits are often contradictory, and equally so are his own self-revelations. On one and the same day he writes a letter which exhibits him as the helpless victim of his emotions, and another which shows him quite at his ease and master of himself. And he himself has warned us against taking his wild words too seriously. In a letter to his sister, written in French, he expressly says: "As for my melancholy, it is not so deep as I have pictured it; there are occasionally poetical licences in my descriptions which exaggerate the facts."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately or unfortunately, the town of Leipzig, which his father had chosen for his first free contact with life, was of all German towns the one where he could see life in its greatest variety. "In accursed Leipzig," he wrote after his three years' experience of its distractions, "one burns out as quickly as a bad torch." Even the external appearance of the town was such as to suggest another world from that of Frankfort. In Frankfort the past overshadowed the present; while Leipzig, Goethe himself wrote, recording his first impressions of the place, "evoked no memories of bygone times." And if the exterior of

<sup>1</sup> Sept. 27, 1766.



the town suggested a new world, its social and intellectual atmosphere intensified the impression. "Leipzig is the place for me," says Frosch in the Auerbach Cellar Scene in *Faust*; "it is a little Paris, and gives its folks a finish."<sup>1</sup> The prevailing tone of Leipzig society was, in point of fact, deliberately imitated from the pattern set to Europe by the Court of France. In contrast to the old-fashioned formality of Frankfort, the Leipziger aimed at a graceful *insouciance* in social intercourse, and light, cynical banter in the interchange of his ideas on every subject, trifling or serious. In such a society all free, spontaneous expression of emotions or opinions was a mark of rusticity, as Goethe was not long in discovering. The true Leipziger was, of course, a Gallio in religion, and Goethe, who, on leaving his father's house, had resolved to cut all connection with the Church, found no difficulty in carrying out his intention during his residence in the "little Paris." But, so far as Goethe was concerned, the most notable circumstance connected with Leipzig was that it had long been the literary centre of Germany. There the most eminent representatives of literature had made their residence, and thence had gone forth the dominant influences which had given the rule to all forms of literary production—poetry and criticism alike. At the time when Goethe took up his residence in the town the two most prominent German men of letters, Gellert and Gottsched (the latter dubbed the "Saxon Swan" by Frederick the Great) were its most distinguished ornaments, though the rising generation was beginning to question both the intrinsic merit of their productions and the principles of taste which they had proclaimed. What these principles were and how Goethe stood related to them, we shall presently see.

Into this world Goethe was launched when he had just turned his sixteenth year—"a little, odd,

<sup>1</sup> On the occasion of a visit he paid to Leipzig in 1783, Goethe says: "Die Leipziger sind als eine kleine, moralische Republik anzusehn. Jeder steht für sich, hat eigene Freunde und geht in seinem Wesen fort."



coddled boy," and, as he elsewhere describes himself, with a tendency to morbid fancies. If he had come to Leipzig with the resolve to fulfil his father's intentions, his course was clearly marked out for him. He would diligently sit at the feet of the professors of law in the University, and at the end of three years he would return to Frankfort with the attainments requisite to make him a future ornament of the legal profession. But, as we have seen, he had other schemes in his head than the course which his father had prescribed for him, and, if we are to accept his own later testimony, in forming these schemes he was but following the deepest instincts of his nature. "Anything," he exclaimed to his secretary Riemer, when he was approaching his sixtieth year, "anything but an enforced profession! That is contrary to all my instincts. So far as I can, and so long as the humour lasts, I will carry out in a playful fashion what comes in my way. So I unconsciously trifled in my youth; so will I consciously continue to do to the end."<sup>1</sup> The step he now took is a curious illustration of the solemn self-importance which was one of his characteristics as a youth. To the professor of history and law, of all people, he chose to announce his intention of studying *belles lettres* instead of jurisprudence. The professor sensibly pointed out to him the folly and impropriety of his conduct in view of his father's wishes; and his counsels, seconded by the friendly advice of his wife, Frau Böhme, turned the youthful aspirant from his purpose for a time. On his own testimony he now became a model student, and was "as happy as a bird in a wood." He heard lectures on German history from Böhme, though history was distasteful to him at every period of his life; lectures on literature from the popular Gellert; on style from Professor Clodius; and on physics, logic, and philosophy from other professors.

But alike by temperament and by previous training, Goethe was indisposed to profit by professorial

<sup>1</sup> *Gespräche mit Riemer, Anfang, 1807.*

prelections, however admirable. He had brought with him to the University a store of miscellaneous information which deprived them of the novelty they might have for the average listener. "Application," he says, moreover, "was not my talent, since nothing gave me any pleasure except what came to me of itself." So it was that by the close of his first semester his attendance at lectures became a jest, and the professors the butt of his wit. It was characteristic that he found the prelections on philosophy and logic specially tedious and distasteful. Of God and the world he thought he knew as much as his teachers, and the scholastic analysis of the processes of thought seemed to him only the deadening of the faculties which he had received from nature. Of these dreary hours in the lecture-rooms the biting comments of Faust and Mephistopheles on university studies in general are the lively reminiscence.

But while he was putting in a perfunctory attendance at lectures, his education was proceeding in another school—the school which, as in his after years he so insistently testified, affords the only real discipline for life—the world of real men and women.<sup>1</sup> And the lessons of this school he took in with a zest that well illustrates what he called his "chameleon" nature. Within a year the "little, odd, coddled boy" who had left his father's house was transformed into a fashionable Leipzig youth who went even beyond his models. His home-made suit, which had passed muster in Frankfort, but which excited ridicule in Leipzig, was exchanged for a costume which went to the other extreme of dandyism. His inner man underwent a corresponding transformation, and, as was so often to be the case with him, it was a woman who was the efficacious instrument of the change. We have just seen how Frau Böhme seconded her husband's attempts to dissuade him

<sup>1</sup> Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,  
Sich ein Character in dem Strom der Welt.

from abandoning his legal studies, but her good offices did not end there. A woman of cultivated mind and considerable literary attainments, she evidently saw the promise of the raw Frankfort youth, and, with a feminine tact, to which Goethe bore grateful testimony, she set herself to correct his manners and his tastes. He had brought with him his Frankfort habits of speech, and these under protest he was forced to give up for the modish forms of the smooth-speaking Leipzigers.<sup>1</sup> Before Frau Böhme took him in hand, he assures us, he was not an ill-mannered lad, but she impressed on him the need of cultivating the external graces of social intercourse and even of acquiring a certain skill in the fashionable games of the day—an accomplishment, however, which he never succeeded in attaining. More important for his future development was Frau Böhme's influence on his literary tastes. As was his habit among his friends, he would declaim to her passages from his favourite poets, and she, "an enemy to all that was trivial, feeble, and commonplace," would unsparingly point out their essential inanity. When he ventured to recite his own poetical attempts, her criticism was equally unsparing. The discipline was sharp, but for the "coddled" boy, who had been regarded at home as a youthful prodigy, it was entirely wholesome. Yet, if we may judge from a description of him some ten months after his arrival in Leipzig, the chastening does not appear to have lessened his buoyant self-confidence. The description is from the hand of a comrade of his own in Frankfort, Horn by name, the son of a former chief magistrate of the city. Horn, like Goethe, had come to study in Leipzig, and on his arrival there, 1766, he thus (August, 1766) records his impressions of Goethe to a common friend: "If you only saw him, you would be either furious with rage or burst with laughing. It is

<sup>1</sup> In point of fact Goethe retained to the end the intonation and the idioms of his native speech.



beyond me to understand how any one can change so quickly. Besides being arrogant, he is also a dandy, and his clothes, though fine, are in such ridiculous taste that they attract the attention of the whole University.<sup>1</sup> But he does not mind that a bit, and it is useless to tell him of his follies. . . . He has acquired a gait which is simply intolerable. Could you only see him !” Such was Horn’s first impression of his former comrade, but it is right to say that a few months later he could tell the same correspondent that they had not lost a friend in Goethe, who had still the same good heart and was as much a philosopher and a moralist as ever.

In his second letter Horn gives a singular reason for the preposterous airs which Goethe had lately put on. Goethe, wrote Horn, had fallen in love with a girl “beneath him in rank,” and his antics were assumed to disguise the fact from his friends who might report it to his father. Goethe’s relations to this girl were to be his liveliest experience in Leipzig, and an experience to be repeated frequently at different periods of his life. Like his other adventures of the same nature, it was to supply him with a fund of emotions and reflections which at a future day were to serve him as literary capital. The tale of his passion, if passion it was, is, therefore, an essential part of his biography, both as a man and a literary artist.

The girl in question was Käthchen (or, as Goethe calls her in his Autobiography, Ännchen) Schönkopf, the daughter of a wineseller and lodging-house keeper in Leipzig, whose wife, we are informed, belonged to a “patrician” family in Frankfort. As described by Horn, she was “well-grown though not tall, with a round, pleasant face, though not particularly pretty, and with an open, gentle, and engaging air”; and in a letter to his sister Goethe gives the further information that she had a “good heart, not bewildered

<sup>1</sup> In his Autobiography Goethe states, as the reason for his casting off the home-made suit he had brought with him from Frankfort, that a person entering the Leipzig theatre in similar costume excited the ridicule of the audience.

with too much reading," and that her spelling was dubious. And it may be noted in passing that Goethe apparently had a preference for women who were not sophisticated by letters, as was notably shown in the case of the woman whom he eventually made his wife.

It was on April 26, 1766, that he first made the declaration of his passion, so that, when Horn wrote, we are to suppose that its course was in full tide.<sup>1</sup> But now, as always, Goethe had room for two objects in his affections. On October 1, 1766, he wrote letters to two friends,<sup>2</sup> in the second of which he expressed his passion for Kätchen, and in the first an equally ardent emotion for another maiden who had crossed his path in Frankfort. Goethe's confidant throughout his relations with Kätchen was one of those peculiar persons whom we meet with in following his career. He was one Behrisch, now residing in Leipzig in the capacity of tutor to a young German count. In his Autobiography Goethe has given a large place to Behrisch, who, as there depicted, comes before us as an accomplished man of the world, something of a *roué*, and a humorist in the old English sense of the word. He never appeared without his periwig, invariably wore a suit of grey, and was never seen in public without his sword, hat under arm. Of a caustic wit, of considerable literary attainments, and approaching his thirtieth year, he had evidently an influence on Goethe which was not wholly for good. He took a genuine interest in Goethe's literary efforts, gave him sound advice on points of style, and dissuaded him from hasty publication. On the other hand, it was under his influence that Goethe began to assume the tone and airs of a Don Juan, which are an unpleasant characteristic of his recently published correspondence with Behrisch. It is in this correspondence that we have the record of Goethe's dallies with Kätchen, and, take it as we may, the record is as vivid a presentment as we

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Behrisch, April 26, 1766.

<sup>2</sup> Trapp and Moors.



could wish of a nature as complex in its emotions as it was steadfast in its central bent.

The letters to Behrisch begin in October, 1766, and present Goethe in the light of a happy lover. There is an assiduous rival, but his addresses are coldly received.<sup>1</sup> In an ecstasy of delight, after a four hours' *tête-à-tête* with Käthchen, he treats Behrisch to some lines of English verse which may be reproduced here as exhibiting the state of his feelings and the extent of his acquaintance with the English language:—

What pleasure, God ! of like a flame to born,  
A virtuous fire, that ne'er to vice kan turn.  
What volupty ! when trembling in my arms,  
The bosom of my maid my bosom warmeth !  
Perpetual kisses of her lips o'erflow,  
In holy embrace mighty virtue show.

In letters written to his sister Cornelia about the same date, however, we see another side of his life in Leipzig. He has been excluded from the society in which he was formerly received, and he assigns as reasons that he is following the counsels of his father in refusing to engage in play, and that he cannot avoid showing a sense of his superiority in taste which gives offence. But, as we learn that Behrisch was also excluded from the same society, and that he was dismissed from the charge of his pupils on the ground of his loose life, we may infer that Goethe does not state all the reasons for his own social ostracism.<sup>2</sup>

So things stood with him in October, 1766, and it is not till the following May that we hear of him again through his correspondence. In a letter to Cornelia written in that month he excuses himself for his long neglect of her. He has been busy, he has been ill, and the spring has come late. In this letter he writes of Käthchen as follows: "Among my acquaintances who are alive (he has just mentioned the death of Frau Böhme) the little Schölkopf

<sup>1</sup> October 8, 1766.

<sup>2</sup> To Cornelia, on October 18, 1766.

does not deserve to be forgotten. She is a very good girl, with an uprightness of heart joined to agreeable *naïveté*, though her education has been more severe than good. She looks after my linen and other things when it is necessary, for she knows all about these matters, and is pleased to give me the benefit of her knowledge; and I like her well for that. Am I not a bit of a scamp, seeing I am in love with all these girls? Who could resist them when they are good; for as for beauty, that does not touch me; and, indeed, all my acquaintances are more good than beautiful."<sup>1</sup> This is not the tone of an ardent lover speaking of his mistress, and it is evident that Cornelia was not the confidant of his real relations to Käthchen, which, indeed, would have been as distasteful to her as to their father. In another letter, addressed to her in the following August, he is not more frank. There he tells her that Annette is now his muse, and that, as Herodotus names the books of his History after the nine muses, so he has given the name of Annette to a collection of twelve poetical pieces, magnificently copied in manuscript.<sup>2</sup> But, he significantly adds, Annette had no more to do with his poetry than the muses had to do with the History of Herodotus.<sup>3</sup> To what extent this statement expressed the truth we shall presently see.

In October, 1767, Goethe resumed his correspondence with Behrisch, and it is in this part of it that we have the fullest revelation of his state of mind during the last year of his residence in Leipzig. With the exception of occasional digressions these letters are solely concerned with his relations to Käthchen, and their outpourings afterwards received their faithful echo in the incoherences of Werther. Here is the beginning of a letter to Behrisch (October 13), in which he described his feelings as

<sup>1</sup> May 11-15, 1767. The passage is in French.

<sup>2</sup> This was the work of Behrisch, who was a virtuoso in calligraphy.

<sup>3</sup> August, 1767.

evoked by the appearance of two rivals for the favours of Käthchen. "Another night like this, Behrisch, and, in spite of all my sins, I shan't have to go to hell. You may have slept peacefully, but a jealous lover, who has drunk as much champagne as is necessary to put his blood in a pleasant heat and to inflame his imagination to the highest point! At first I could not sleep, I tossed about in my bed, sprang up, raved; then I grew weary and fell asleep." And he proceeds to relate a wild dream in which Käthchen was the distracting image; and he concludes: "There you have Annette. She is a cursed lass!"<sup>1</sup> Yet on the same day or the day following he could thus describe his mode of life in a letter to his sister: "It is very philosophical," he writes; "I have given up concerts, comedies, riding and driving, and have abandoned all societies of young folks who might lead me into more company. This will be of great advantage to my purse."<sup>2</sup> Very different is the picture of his mode of life in his subsequent letters to Behrisch at the same period. If we are to take him literally, it was the life of a veritable Don Juan who had learned all the lessons of his instructor. "Do you recognize me in this tone, Behrisch?" he writes; "it is the tone of a conquering young lord. . . . It is comic. Aber ohne zu schwören ich unterstehe mich schon ein Mädchen zu verf—wie Teufel soll ich's nennen. Enough, Monsieur, all this is but what you might have expected from the aptest and most diligent of your scholars."<sup>3</sup> That all this was not mere bravado is distinctly suggested even in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, where the wild doings of Leipzig are so decorously draped.

Goethe knew from the first that he could never make Käthchen his wife, and that sooner or later his love-making must come to an end. The end came in the spring of 1768 after two years' philandering which had not been all happiness. In a letter to Behrisch

<sup>1</sup> October 13, 1767.

<sup>2</sup> October 14, 1767.

<sup>3</sup> November 7, 1767.



he thus relates the *dénouement*: "Oh, Behrisch," he writes, "I have begun to live! Could I but tell you the whole story! I cannot; it would cost me too much. Enough—we have separated, we are happy.... Behrisch, we are living in the pleasantest, friendliest intercourse. . . . We began with love and we end with friendship."<sup>1</sup> Goethe makes one of his characters say that estranged lovers, if they only manage things well, may still remain friends, and the remark was prompted by more than one experience of his own.

When he was past his seventieth year, Goethe made a remark to his friend, Chancellor von Müller, which is applicable to every period of his life: "In the hundred things which interest me," he said, "there is always one which, as chief planet, holds the central place, and meanwhile the remaining Quodlibet of my life circles round it in many-changing phases, till each and all succeed in reaching the centre." Even in these distracted Leipzig years the mental process thus described is clearly visible. Neither Goethe's loves nor his other dissipations ever permanently dulled the intellectual side of his nature. While he was writing morbid letters to Behrisch, he was directing the studies of his sister with all the seriousness of a youthful pedagogue. Though he neglected the lectures of his professors, he was assimilating knowledge on every subject that appealed to his natural instincts. In truth, all the manifold activities of his later years were foreshadowed during his sojourn in Leipzig, as, indeed, they had already been foreshadowed during his boyhood in Frankfort.

As in Frankfort, he took in knowledge equally from men, books, and things.<sup>2</sup> In the house of a Leipzig citizen, a physician and botanist, he met a society of medical men, and he records how his attention was directed to an entirely new field through listening to their conversation. Now, apparently for

<sup>1</sup> April 26, 1768.

<sup>2</sup> "Das Bedürfniss meiner Natur zwingt mich zu einer vermannigfaltigten Thätigkeit," he wrote of himself in his thirty-second year.

the first time, he heard the names of Haller, Buffon, and Linnæus, the last of whom he, in later years, classed with Spinoza and Shakespeare as one of the chief moulding forces of his life. Through the influence and example of other men he intermittently practised etching, drawing, and engraving—all arts in which he retained a lifelong interest. But among all the persons in Leipzig who influenced him, Goethe gave the first place to Friedrich Oeser, director of the Academy of Drawing in the city. Oeser was about fifty years of age, jovial in disposition, and an experienced man of the world. Though as an artist he is now held in little regard, his reputation was great in his own day,<sup>1</sup> and he had a reflected glory in being the friend of Winckelmann, who was believed to have profited by his teaching in art. Under the inspiration of Oeser, Goethe's interest in the plastic arts in general, which had received its first impulse at home, became a permanent preoccupation for the remainder of his life. He took regular lessons in drawing from Oeser, made acquaintance with all the collections, public and private, to be found in Leipzig, and even made a secret visit to the galleries in Dresden, where, he tells us, he gave his exclusive attention to the works of the great Dutch masters. As was always his habit, Goethe generously acknowledged his obligations to Oeser. "Who among all my teachers, except yourself," he afterwards wrote on his return to Frankfort, "ever thought me worthy of encouragement? They heaped either all blame or all praise upon me, and nothing can be so destructive of talent. . . . You know what I was when I came to you, and what when I left you: the difference is your work . . . you have taught me to be modest without self-depreciation, and to be proud without presumption."<sup>2</sup> And elsewhere he declares that

<sup>1</sup> When, in his thirty-sixth year, Goethe renewed his acquaintance with Oeser, he wrote of him to Frau von Stein: "C'est comme si cet homme ne devoit pas mourir, tant ses talents paroissent toujours aller en s'augmentant."

<sup>2</sup> November 9, 1768.



the great lesson he had learned from Oeser was that the ideal of beauty is to be found in "simplicity and repose." But the main interest of Goethe's intercourse with Oeser in connection with his general development is that it strengthened an illusion from which he did not succeed in freeing himself till near his fortieth year—the illusion that nature had given him equally the gifts of the painter and the poet. Many hours of the best years of his life were to be spent in laboriously practising an art in which he was doomed to mediocrity; and it must remain a riddle that one, who like Goethe was so curiously studious of his own self-development, should so long and so blindly have misunderstood his own gifts.<sup>1</sup>

It may partly explain his addiction to art that the poetical productions which he had brought from Frankfort, and which had been applauded by the circle of his friends there, did not meet with the approval of the critics in Leipzig. We have seen how sharply Frau Böhme commented on their shortcomings, but he was specially disheartened by the severe criticism passed on one of his poems by Clodius, the professor of literature. "I am cured of the folly of thinking myself a poet,"<sup>2</sup> he wrote to his sister about a year after his arrival in Leipzig. Some eight months later he writes to her in a more hopeful spirit: "Since I am wholly without pride, I may trust my inner conviction, which tells me that I possess some of the qualities required in a poet, and that by diligence I may even become one."<sup>3</sup> In his Autobiography and elsewhere Goethe has spoken at length of the disadvantages under which youthful geniuses laboured at the period when he began his literary career.<sup>4</sup> As Germany then existed, there was

<sup>1</sup> In later years he consoled himself with the reflection that the time he had spent on the technicalities of art was not wholly lost, as he had thus acquired powers of observation which were valuable to him both as a poet and as a man of science.

<sup>2</sup> September 27, 1766.

<sup>3</sup> May 11, 1767.

<sup>4</sup> Notably in his paper, entitled *Literarischer Sansculottismus*. See above, p. 4. Regarding Lessing he made this remark to Eckermann

no national feeling to inspire great themes, no standard of taste, and no worthy models for imitation. There was, indeed, no lack of literature on all subjects; Kant speaks sarcastically of "the deluge of books with which our part of the world is inundated every year." But the fatal defects of the poetry then produced was triviality and the "wateriness" of its style. Yet it was during the years that Goethe spent in Leipzig that there appeared a succession of works which mark a new departure in German literature. In 1766, Herder, who was subsequently to exercise such a profound influence over Goethe, published his *Fragments on Modern German Literature*; in the same year appeared Lessing's *Laokoon*, which, in Goethe's own words, transported himself and his contemporaries "out of the region of pitifully contracted views into the domain of emancipated thought"; and in 1767 Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*, Germany's "first national drama." Greatly as Goethe was impressed by both of these works of Lessing, however, he was not mature enough to profit by them;<sup>1</sup> and, in point of fact, all the work, poems and plays, which he produced during his Leipzig period, is inspired solely by the French models which had so long dominated German literature.

Considering his other manifold preoccupations, the amount of Goethe's literary output during his three years in Leipzig is sufficient evidence that his poetic instincts remained the dominant impulses of his nature. He sprinkled his letters to his friends with poems in German, French, and English, and he composed twenty lyrics which were subsequently published in the autumn of 1769 under the title of *Neue Lieder*,<sup>2</sup> and two plays, entitled *Die Laune*

(February 7, 1827): "Bedauert doch den ausserordentlichen Menschen, dass er in einer so erbärmlichen Zeit leben musste, die ihm keine bessern Stoffe gab, als in seinen Stücken verarbeitet sind!"

<sup>1</sup> "Lessing war der höchste Verstand, und nur ein ebenso grosser konnte von ihm wahrhaft lernen. Dem Halbvermögen war er gefährlich." (To Eckermann, January 18, 1825.)

<sup>2</sup> Nine of these *Lieder* Goethe thought worthy of a permanent place in his collected works.

*des Verliebten* and *Die Mitschuldigen*. The biographic interest of all these productions is the light which they throw on the transformation which Goethe had undergone during his residence in Leipzig. In the poems he had written in Frankfort religion had been the predominant theme; in his Leipzig effusions it was love, and love in a sufficiently Anacreontic sense. Regarding the poetic merit of the *Neue Lieder* German critics are for the most part at one. With hardly an exception the love lyrics are mere imitations of French models; their style is as artificial as their feeling; and they give little promise of the work that was to come from the same hand a few years later. As the expression of one of his lover's moods, one of them, reckoned the best in the collection, may here be given. It is entitled *Die schöne Nacht*.

## DIE SCHÖNE NACHT.

Nun verlass' ich diese Hütte,  
Meiner Liebsten Aufenthalt;  
Wandle mit verhülltem Schritte  
Durch den öden, finstern Wald.  
Luna bricht durch Busch und Eichen,  
Zephyr meldet ihren Lauf;  
Und die Birken streun mit Neigen  
Ihr den süssten Weihrauch auf.

Wie ergötz' ich mich im Kühlen  
Dieser schönen Sommernacht!  
O wie still ist hier zu fühlen,  
Was die Seele glücklich macht!  
Lässt sich kaum die Wonne fassen,  
Und doch wollt' ich, Himmel! dir  
Tausend solcher Nächte lassen,  
Gäb' mein Mädchen Eine mir.

## THE BEAUTIFUL NIGHT.

Now I leave the cot behind me  
Where my love hath her abode;  
And I wander with veiled footsteps  
Through the drear and darksome wood.  
Luna's rays pierce oak and thicket,  
Zephyr heraldeth her way;  
And for her its sweetest incense  
Sheddeth every birchen spray.



How I revel in the coolness  
Of this beauteous summer night!  
Ah! how peaceful here the feeling  
Of what makes the soul's delight,  
Bliss wellnigh past comprehending!  
Yet, O Heaven, I would to thee  
Thousand nights like this surrender,  
Gave my maiden one to me.

But it is in the two plays produced during this period that Goethe most fully reveals both his literary ideals and the essential traits of his own character. The first of the two, *Die Laune des Verliebten* ("The Lover's Caprice"), is based on his own relations to Käthchen Schönkopf, and is cast in the form of a pastoral drama, written in Alexandrines after the fashion of the time.<sup>1</sup> The theme is a satire on his own wayward conduct towards Käthchen, as he has depicted it in his Autobiography. The plot is of the simplest kind. Two pairs of lovers, Egle and Lamon, and Amine and Eridon, the first pair happy in their loves, the second unhappy, make up the characters of the piece. The leading part is taken by Egle, who is distressed at the misery of her friend Amine, occasioned by the jealous humours of her lover Eridon. Complications there are none, and the sole interest of the play consists in the vivacity of the dialogues and in the arch mischief with which Egle eventually shames Eridon out of his foolish jealousy of his maiden, who is only too fondly devoted to him. What strikes us in the whole performance is that Goethe, if he was so madly in love with Käthchen as his letters to Behrisch represent him, should have been capable of writing it. From its playful humour and entirely objective treatment it might have been written by a good-natured onlooker amused at the spectacle of two young people trifling with feelings which neither could take seriously.

Equally objective is Goethe's handling of the very different theme of the other play, *Die Mitschuldigen*

<sup>1</sup> This play was based on an earlier attempt in Frankfort.

("The Accomplices"),<sup>1</sup> and in this case the objectivity is still more remarkable in a youth who had not yet attained his twentieth year. This second piece belongs to the class of low comedy, and is as simple in construction as its companion. The scene is laid in an inn, and the characters are four in number: the Host, whose leading trait is insatiable curiosity; his daughter Sophia, represented as of easy virtue; Söller, her husband, a graceless scamp; and Alcestes, a former lover of Sophia, and for the time a guest in the inn. In the central scene of the play there come in succession to Alcestes' room in the course of one night Söller, who steals Alcestes' gold; the Host, to possess himself of a letter with the contents of which he has a burning curiosity to become acquainted; and Sophia by appointment with Alcestes. As father and daughter have caught sight of each other on their respective errands, each suspects the other of being the thief, and in a sorry scene the father, on the condition of being permitted to read the letter, which turns out to be a trivial note, informs Alcestes that Sophia is the delinquent. Finally, Söller, under the threat of a prick from Alcestes' sword, confesses to the theft, and the piece ends with a mutual agreement to condone each other's delinquencies.<sup>2</sup> The play is not without humour, and the different characters are vivaciously presented, but the blindest admirers of the master may well regret, as they mostly have regretted, that such a work should have come from his hands. The most charitable construction we can put on the graceless production is that Goethe, out of his abnormal impressionability, for the time being deliberately assumed the tone of

<sup>1</sup> The exact time and place of its composition is uncertain, but Goethe's own testimony seems to indicate that it was mainly written in Leipzig, in 1769. It was first published in 1787, with some modifications, which affect only the form.

<sup>2</sup> With a fatuity into which he occasionally fell, Goethe in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* remarks that his two plays are an illustration of that most Christian text, "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone."



cynical indifference with which he had become familiar in his intercourse with his friend Behrisch.

In direct connection with the shorter poems which Goethe wrote in Leipzig, there is a passage in his Autobiography which has perhaps been more frequently quoted than any other, and which, according as we interpret it, must materially influence our judgment at once on his character and on his genius. The passage is as follows: "And thus began that tendency of which, all my life through, I was never able to break myself; the tendency to transmute into a picture or a poem whatever gave me either pleasure or pain, or otherwise preoccupied me, and thus to arrive at a judgment regarding it, with the object at once of rectifying my ideas of things external to me and of calming my own feelings. This gift was in truth perhaps necessary to no one more than to me, whose temperament was continually tossing him from one extreme to another. All my productions proceeding from this tendency that have become known to the world are only fragments of a great confession which it is the bold attempt of this book to complete."

From the context of this passage it is to be inferred that the habit which Goethe describes applied only to the occasional short poems which he threw off at the different periods of his life. But are we to infer that the account here given of Goethe's occasional poems applies to the passionate lyrics which a few years later he was to pour forth in such abundance? To a very different purport is another passage in the Autobiography, which is at the same time a striking commentary on Wordsworth's remark that Goethe's poetry was "not inevitable enough." "I had come," he there says, "to look upon my indwelling poetic talent altogether as a force of nature; the more so as I had always been compelled to regard outward nature as its proper object. The exercise of this poetic faculty might indeed be excited and determined by circumstances; but its most joyful and

richest action was spontaneous—even involuntary. In my nightly vigils the same thing happened; so that I often wished, like one of my predecessors, to have a leathern jerkin made, and to get accustomed to writing in the dark, so as to be able to fix on paper all such unpremeditated effusions. It had so often happened to me that, after composing some snatch of poetry in my head, I could not recall it, that I would now hurry to my desk and, without once breaking off, write off the poem from beginning to end, not even taking time to straighten the paper, if it lay crosswise, so that the verses often slanted across the page. In such a mood I preferred to get hold of a lead pencil, because I could write most readily with it; whereas the scratching and spluttering of a pen would sometimes wake me from a poetic dream, confuse me, and so stifle some trifling production in its birth.”<sup>1</sup>

Poetry produced as here described may certainly be regarded as part of the poet’s “confession,” but in the circumstances of its origin it is a world apart from the poetry composed in the fashion described in the passage preceding. The poet here does not coolly say to himself: “Go to, I will make a poem to relieve my feelings”; he sings, to quote Goethe’s own expression, “as the bird sings,” out of the sheer fulness of his heart, which insists on immediate expression.<sup>2</sup> True it is that Goethe, like all other

<sup>1</sup> The translation of this passage is by Miss Minna Steele Smith—*Poetry and Truth from My Own Life* (London, 1908).

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to W. von Rumohr (September 28, 1807), Goethe calls “unaufhaltsame Natur, unüberwindliche Neigung, drängende Leidenschaft” the “Haupterfordernisse der wahren Poesie.” In two of his *Zahme Xenien* Goethe has expressed his opinion on the necessity of inspiration in poetic production:—

Ja das ist das rechte Gleis,  
Dass man nicht weiss,  
Was man denkt,  
Wenn man denkt:  
Alles ist als wie geschenkt.

All unser redlichstes Bemühn  
Glückt nur im unbewussten Momente.  
Wie möchte denn die Rose blühn,  
Wenn sie der Sonne Herrlichkeit erkannte!

poets, frequently wrote under no immediate pressure of inspiration, but to affirm this of the highest efforts of his genius is at once to contradict his own testimony and to misinterpret the conditions under which genius produces its results.

## CHAPTER III

### AT HOME IN FRANKFORT

SEPTEMBER, 1768—APRIL, 1770

ON August 28, 1768, Goethe left Leipzig after a residence of nearly three years. He had gone to Leipzig in the spirit of a prisoner released from his gaol; he left it in the spirit of one returning to durance. In his Autobiography he has described the depressing conditions under which he re-entered his father's house. In body and mind he had found that in "accursed Leipzig one burns out as quickly as a bad torch." In body he was a broken man. One night in the beginning of August he had been seized with a violent hæmorrhage, and for some weeks his life hung by a thread. In his Autobiography he assigns various reasons for his illness. As the result of an accident on his journey from Frankfort to Leipzig he had strained the ligaments of his chest, and the mischief was aggravated by a subsequent fall from his horse; he had suffered from the fumes of the acids he had inhaled in the process of etching; he had ruined his digestion by drinking coffee and heavy beer; and, in accordance with the precepts of Rousseau, he had adopted a *régime* which proved too severe for his enfeebled constitution. So he wrote in his old age, but his contemporary letters leave us in little doubt regarding the cause of his breakdown. He had, in fact, during the latter part of his sojourn in Leipzig lived the life of the average German student of his day. He had fought a duel, and had been wounded in the arm; he had drunk more than



was good for him, and we have seen that he had followed other courses not conducive to his bodily health.

His mental condition was equally unsatisfactory. There was not a friend, he tells us, whom at one time or another he had not annoyed by his caprice, or offended by his "morbid spirit of contradiction" and sullen avoidance of intercourse. All through his life Goethe seems to have tried his friends by his variable humours,<sup>1</sup> but it was seldom that he completely alienated them, and he gratefully records how in his present stricken condition they rallied to his side, and put him to shame by their assiduous attentions. One of these friends, Langer by name, who had succeeded Behrisch as tutor to the young Count, he specially mentions as helping to give a new turn to his thoughts. Langer was religiously disposed, and found in Goethe, now in a mood to receive them, a sympathetic listener to his theological views. Under Langer's influence he resumed his youthful study of the Bible—not in the Old Testament, however, but in the New, which he read, he tells us, with "emotion and enthusiasm." It was the beginning of a new phase in his life which was to last for about a year and a half, a phase in which religion, if we are to accept the testimony of his Autobiography, held the uppermost place in his thoughts.

It was with the feelings of "a shipwrecked seaman," he declares, that he found himself again under his father's roof, though he characteristically adds that "he had nothing specially to reproach himself with." The atmosphere he found at home was not such as to put him in better spirits. Father, mother and daughter had been living in mutual misunderstanding during the whole period of the son's absence in Leipzig. Cornelia had been made the sole

<sup>1</sup> When approaching his eightieth year, Goethe remarked to Chancellor von Müller (March 6, 1828): "Wer mit mir umgehen will, muss zuweilen auch meine Grobianslaune zugeben, ertragen, wie eines andern Schwachheit oder Steckenpferd."

victim of her father's pedagogic discipline, which had been partially alleviated when it was shared with her brother, and she had come to regard her over-anxious parent with a hardness which Goethe describes as having something dreadful (*fürchterliches*) in it. The arrival of Goethe could not improve the existing relations in the household. As in the time before his going to Leipzig, Cornelia drew to him as the only member of the family who sympathetically understood her, and she remained as obdurate as ever in her sullen attitude towards her father. Between Goethe himself and his father the former estrangement continued, and we are given to understand that during the year and a half he now spent under the paternal roof there was no cordial understanding regarding the son's pursuits and his future career.<sup>1</sup> Dissatisfied with his son, as from his own point of view he had good reason to be, Herr Goethe nevertheless cherished a secret pride in his genius. With a paternal pride, which is even touching in the circumstances, he carefully framed the drawings executed by his son, and collected and stitched together his letters from Leipzig.

As in the case of his Leipzig period, Goethe's reminiscent account of his present sojourn in Frankfort gives a somewhat different impression of his main interests from that conveyed by his contemporary letters. If we accept the testimony of his Autobiography, his attention was mainly turned to religion and to chemical and cabbalistical studies; from his correspondence, on the other hand, it would appear that his thoughts at least occasionally ran on subjects that had little to do with his spiritual welfare. At the same time, the apparent discrepancy need not imply self-contradiction. The correspondents to whom his letters were addressed were not persons specially interested in religion or chemistry or the cabbala, and, of

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the time he now spent in Frankfort, Goethe says in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: "Mit dem Vater selbst konnte sich kein angenehmes Verhältniss knüpfen."

all men, Goethe was least likely to be obsessed by any one set of ideas to the exclusion of all others. There can be little doubt, indeed, that during his year and a half in Frankfort religion was a more predominant interest in his life than at any other period; and the fact is sufficiently explained by the circumstances in which he then found himself. From the condition both of his mind and body he was disposed to self-searching. Regret for the past was foreign to his nature; in his mature judgment, indeed, such a feeling was resolutely to be checked in the interest of healthy self-development. Yet in the retrospect of his Leipzig days it seems to have crossed his mind that he might have spent them more wisely. "O that I could recall the last two years and a half,"<sup>1</sup> he wrote to Käthchen Schönkopf, and he warns a male correspondent in Leipzig to "beware of dissoluteness."<sup>2</sup> And the state of his health during the greater part of this time in Frankfort was such as to strengthen this mood. Immediately after his return from Leipzig he was threatened with pulmonary disease, and the state of his digestion became such as to alarm himself and his friends. On December 7 he was attacked by a violent internal pain, and for some days there were the gravest fears for his life. After two months' confinement to his room there was a partial recovery, but it was not till the spring of 1770 that his health was completely restored.

But the truth is that Goethe's temporary pre-occupation with religion is only another illustration of his "chameleon" temperament. In gay Leipzig he had promptly taken on the ways of a man about town; in Frankfort he found himself in a very different society, and he as promptly entered into the spirit of it. The circle of which he now became a member was a company of religious persons, mostly women, friends or acquaintances of his mother. Its most prominent member was that Fräulein von Klettenberg, already mentioned, a woman of high rank,

<sup>1</sup> August 26, 1769.

<sup>2</sup> To Breitkopf, in August, 1769.



culture, and refinement. To moral beauty of character in man or woman, Goethe, at all periods of his life, was peculiarly sensitive,<sup>1</sup> and in the Fräulein he saw a woman who combined at once the most winning graces of her sex and the virtues of a saint. For women of all ages and all types Goethe had always a singular attraction, and, though the Fräulein must have discerned that he could never be a son or brother in the spirit, she was profoundly interested in the wayward youth, in whom she saw a brand that deserved to be plucked from the burning.

With a kind of half consent Goethe entered into the spirit of the pious circle; he even attended communion in spite of his unhappy memories of that sacrament, and was present at a Synod of the Herrnhut Community to which Fräulein von Klettenberg belonged. Bound up with the Fräulein's religion was a curious interest in the occult powers of nature from the point of view of their relation to the human body. It is with evident irony that Goethe relates how in his own case the efficacy of these occult powers was tried. Among the members of the religious community was a mysterious physician who was credited with possessing certain medicines of peculiar virtue. He was believed to have in store one drug—a powerful salt—which he reserved only for the most dangerous cases, and regarding which, though they had never seen the result of its operation, the community spoke with bated breath. At the vehement request of his mother the mysterious medicine was administered to Goethe at the crisis of his malady, at the hour of midnight, and with all due solemnity. From that moment his illness took a favourable turn, and he steadily progressed towards recovery. "I need not say," is his comment, "how greatly this result strengthened and heightened our faith in our physician and our efforts to share such a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his beautiful characterization of Louis Bonaparte, King of Holland, in whom he found the embodiment at once of the Christian graces and of *reine Menschlichkeit*.



treasure." Partly, therefore, out of his own insatiable curiosity and partly out of sympathy with his new friends, Goethe now betook himself to occult studies, and, in imitation of the Fräulein von Klettenberg, had a room fitted up with the necessary chemical apparatus. It was the first practical commencement of those scientific studies which were subsequently to occupy such a large part of his life. Along with his chemical experiments went the study of such visionaries in science as Paracelsus, Van Helmont, and others, but also of the great Boerhave, whose *Institutes of Medicine and Aphorisms*, containing all that was then known of medical theory, he "gladly stamped on his mind and memory."

To what extent are we to infer that Goethe really shared the religious views of the circle of pious persons with whom he was now living in daily contact? His own account we can only regard as half jesting, half serious. He would never have spiritual peace, Fräulein von Klettenberg told him, till he had a "reconciled God." Goethe's rejoinder was that it should be put the other way. Considering his recent sufferings and his own good intentions, it was God who was in arrears to him and who had something to be forgiven. The Fräulein charitably condoned the blasphemy, but she and her fellow-believers were assuredly in the right when they denied the blasphemer the name of *Christian*. Yet, as has been said, Goethe in his own way was seriously in search of a faith that would satisfy both his intellect and his heart, and he even attempted to construct one. A book that fell into his hands, Gottfried Arnold's *Impartial History of the Church and of Heretics*,<sup>1</sup> prompted the attempt. From this book, he tells us, he received a favourable impression of heretics, and the impression was comforting to

<sup>1</sup> Probably Goethe had this book in his mind when he wrote the sarcastic epigram:—

"Es ist die ganze Kirchengeschichte  
Mischmasch von Irrthum und von Gewalt."

one who, like himself, was looked on as a heretic by all his friends. Moreover, he had often heard it said that in the long run every man must have his own religion; why, therefore, should he not essay to think out a creed that would at least satisfy himself? In brief outline he has described the system which he evolved from his miscellaneous historical and scientific studies. It is, as he himself says, a strange composite of Neo-Platonism, and of hermetical, mystical, and cabbalistical speculations, all leading by a necessary logic to the dogmas of Redemption and the Incarnation—a conclusion which at least points to the fact that for Goethe at this time Christianity was a religion specifically predestined for man's salvation. "We all become mystics in old age," is a remark of his own at that period of life; and the conclusion of the Second Part of *Faust*, as well as other indications, proves that the remark was at least true of himself. But, as has often been pointed out, not only in old age, but at every period of his life, there was a mystic strain in him which was only kept in check by what was the strongest instinct of his nature—the instinct that demanded the direct vision of the concrete fact as the only condition on which he could build "the pyramid of his life."

Goethe's experience derived from his intercourse with Fräulein von Klettenberg and her friends undoubtedly enriched his own nature and enlarged his conceptions of the content of human life, of its possible motives and ideals. It was not a circle into which his own affinities would have led him, but being in it, he, as was his invariable habit, drew from it to the full all that it could give for his own building-up. And in enriching his own nature and widening his outlook, the experience enlarged the scope of his creative productiveness. But for his intercourse with these pious enthusiasts the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul" would not have found a place in *Wilhelm Meister*, and from the general

picture of human life and its activities which it is the object of that book to present, there would have been lacking one conception of life and its responsibilities, not the least interesting in the history of the human spirit. Most specific and important of all his gains from his association with the Frankfort community, however, was that from it directly emerged what is universally regarded as his greatest creative effort—the First Part of *Faust*. The conception of that work was closely associated with the chemical experiments and cabbalistic studies suggested by his intercourse with Fräulein von Klettenberg and her circle, and not only associated but carried out on the foundation that had thus been laid.<sup>1</sup>

As has been said, Goethe's contemporary letters addressed from Frankfort to his friends bring a different side of his life before us from that presented in the Autobiography. From these letters we gather that he was by no means wholly engrossed in religious or mystical studies. "During this winter," he wrote to his friend Oeser, about two months after his arrival in Frankfort, "the company of the muses and correspondence with friends will bring pleasure into a sickly, solitary life, which for a youth of twenty years would otherwise be something of a martyrdom."<sup>2</sup> In spite of the affectionate solicitude of Fräulein von Klettenberg and other friends, he found Frankfort a depressing place after gay Leipzig. "I could go mad when I think of Leipzig," wrote his sprightly friend Horn, who had also tasted the pleasures of that place; and Goethe shared his opinion. Both also agreed that the girls of Frankfort were vastly inferior creatures to those of Leipzig. "I came

<sup>1</sup> Yet at a later date he would seem to have regarded his mystical studies as among the errors of his youth. In his *Tagebuch*, under date August 7, 1779, he writes as follows, and the passage may be taken as a commentary on the whole period of his life with which we are dealing: "Stillter Rückblick auf's Leben, auf die Verworrenheit, Betriebsamkeit, Wissbegierde der Jugend, wie sie überall herumschweift, um etwas Befriedigendes zu finden. Wie ich besonders im Geheimnissen, dunklen imaginativen Verhältnissen eine Wollust gefunden habe."

<sup>2</sup> November 9, 1768.



here," Goethe wrote in a poetical epistle to the daughter of Oeser, "and found the girls a little—one does not quite like to speak it out—as they always were; enough, none has as yet touched my heart."<sup>1</sup> It would appear, nevertheless, that he did find certain Frankfort girls to his taste. "I get along tolerably here," he wrote to another correspondent. "I am contented and quiet; I have half-a-dozen angels of girls whom I often see, though I have lost my heart to none of them. They are pleasant creatures, and make my life uncommonly agreeable. He who has seen no Leipzig might be very well off here."<sup>2</sup> His life in Frankfort was, in short, what he himself called it, an exile (*Verbannung*).

Among his correspondents was Käthchen Schönpkopf with whom, as we have seen, he had come to what he thought a satisfactory arrangement before leaving Leipzig. In this correspondence it is the Leipzig student, not the associate of the Fräulein von Klettenberg, who is before us. There is the same waywardness, there are the same irresponsible sallies which made him such a difficult lover. If we are to take him seriously, he still suffered from the pangs of rejected love and regretted that his former relations to Käthchen had not continued. "A lover to whom his love will not listen," he writes, "is by many degrees not so unfortunate as one who has been cast off; the former still retains hope and has at least no fear of being hated; the other, yes, the other, who has once experienced what it is to be cast out of a heart which once was his, gladly avoids thinking, not to say speaking, of it."<sup>3</sup> When this passage was written he had already received the news that Käthchen was betrothed to another. In a final letter which he addressed to her, there occur these characteristic words: "You are still the same loveable girl, and you will also be a loveable wife. And I, I shall remain Goethe. You know what that means. When I

<sup>1</sup> November 6, 1768.

<sup>2</sup> To Breitkopf, in August, 1769.

<sup>3</sup> June 1, 1769.



mention my name, I mention all ; and you know that, as long as I have known you, I have lived only as part of you.”<sup>1</sup> So ended a relation of which it is difficult to say how much there was in it of genuine passion, how much of artificial sentiment. Serious intention in it there was none ; from the first Goethe perfectly realized the fact that he could never make K  thchen his wife.<sup>2</sup>

As at Leipzig, his other distractions did not divert him from his interests in art and literature. When the state of his health permitted, he assiduously practised drawing and etching. “ Now as formerly,” he wrote to Oeser, “ art is almost my chief occupation.” But he also found time for wide excursions into the fields of general literature. Before leaving Leipzig he had exchanged with Langer “ whole baskets-full ” of German poets and critics for Greek authors, and these (though his knowledge of Greek remained to the end elementary) he must have read in a fashion. Latin authors he read were Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, and Pliny. Among the moderns Shakespeare and Moli  re already held the place in his estimation which they always retained. Shakespeare he as yet knew only from the selections in Dodd’s *Beauties* and Wieland’s translation, but he already felt his greatness, and, as we have seen, names him with Wieland and Oeser as one of his masters. “ Voltaire,” he wrote to Oeser, “ has been able to do no harm to Shakespeare ; no lesser spirit will prevail over a greater one.”<sup>3</sup> The German writers who now stood highest in his esteem were Lessing and Wieland. Lessing’s   sthetic teaching he accepted with some reserves, but this did not abate the admiration which he retained for him at every period of his life. “ Lessing ! Lessing ! ” he wrote in the same letter to Oeser ; “ if he were not Lessing, I might say something. Write against him I may not ;

<sup>1</sup> January 23, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe saw K  thchen as a married woman in Leipzig in 1776, when he wrote to the lady who then held his affections (Frau von Stein) : “ Mais ce n’est plus Julie.”

<sup>3</sup> February 14, 1769.

he is a conqueror. . . . He is a mental phenomenon, and, truly, such apparitions are rare in Germany." That Goethe, at this period, should have had such an unbounded admiration for Wieland is an interesting commentary on his pietistic leanings; for Wieland was now in his full pagan phase, so distasteful to moral Germany, as Goethe himself indicates. "I have already been annoyed on Wieland's account," he writes<sup>1</sup>—"I think with justice. Wieland has often the misfortune to be misunderstood; frequently, perhaps, the fault is his own, but as frequently it is not." At a later day Goethe clearly saw and marked in Wieland that lack of "high seriousness" on which he himself came to lay such stress as all-important in literature and life, but in the meantime he freely acknowledged what Wieland had been to him.<sup>2</sup> "After him [Oeser] and Shakespeare," he wrote in the letter just quoted, "Wieland is still the only one whom I can hold as my true master; others had shown me where I had gone astray; they showed me how to do better."

What is noteworthy in the serious passages of Goethe's Frankfort letters is the advance in maturity and self-knowledge which they reveal when compared with those written from Leipzig. Penetrative remarks on men and things, such as give its value to its later correspondence, now begin to fall from his pen by the way. He consciously takes the measure of his own powers, and forms clear judgments on the literary and artistic tastes of the time. The poems which he had written in Leipzig now seemed to him "trifling, cold, dry, and superficial," and, as in Leipzig he had made a holocaust of his boyish poems, so he made a second holocaust of those produced in Leipzig. In a very long letter which he addressed to Friederike Oeser he thus expounds

<sup>1</sup> February 20, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe has this entry in his *Tagebuch* (April 2, 1780): "Wieland sieht ganz unglaublich alles, was man machen will, macht und was hangt und langt in einer Schrift."

the artistic ideals at which he had then arrived: "A great scholar is seldom a great philosopher, and he who has laboriously thumbed the pages of many books regards with contempt the simple, easy book of nature; and yet nothing is true except what is simple—certainly a sorry recommendation for true wisdom. Let him who goes the way of simplicity go it in quiet. Modesty and circumspection are the essential characteristics of him who would tread this path, and every step will bring its reward. I have to thank your dear father for these conceptions: he it was who prepared my mind to receive them; time will give its blessing to my diligence which may complete the work he began."<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, partly owing to the depressing conditions in which he found himself, and partly, it may be, out of his own deliberate purpose, Goethe produced no work of importance during the year and a half he spent in Frankfort. It was a period of incubation, and the stimulus to production was to come to him in another environment.

In the spring of 1770 Goethe recovered his normal health and spirits, and, in accordance with his father's wish, he proceeded to Strassburg to complete his legal studies. He left home with as intense a feeling of relief as he had left it on the previous occasion. Between him and his father there had been growing estrangement, and the estrangement had ended in an open quarrel when he ventured to criticize the architecture of the paternal house, which had been constructed under his father's own directions. Thwarted though the father had been in his hopes of his son, however, he was not turned from his purpose of affording him every opportunity of laying a broad foundation of general culture. It was his express wish that Wolfgang, after completing his studies in Strassburg, should travel in France and spend some time in Paris.

<sup>1</sup> February 13, 1769.



## CHAPTER IV

### GOETHE IN STRASSBURG

APRIL, 1770—AUGUST, 1771

GOETHE was in his twenty-first year when he entered Strassburg in the beginning of April, 1770. From his maturer age and the chastening experience of the preceding eighteen months, therefore, it was to be expected that his management of his life in his new home would be more in accordance with his father's wishes than his wild ways in Leipzig. In sending his son to Strassburg it was the father's intention that he should complete those legal studies of which he had made a jest in Leipzig, and qualify himself for the profession by which he was to make his future living. During his residence of some sixteen months in Strassburg Goethe did actually fulfil his father's wish, and returned to Frankfort as a full-fledged Licenciate of Laws, but as little as at Leipzig did the interests which engrossed him suggest future eminence in his profession.

What again strikes us is the rapidity with which he caught the tone of his new surroundings. In Strassburg he found a society whose ways of living and thinking were equally different from those of Frankfort and of Leipzig. Strassburg had not the bounded intellectual horizon which made him feel himself an alien in his native town, nor, on the other hand, did it offer the opportunities for frivolous distraction which he found in the "little Paris." Strassburg had been a French town for a hundred years, but there was no town in Germany more intensely German in its sympathies and aspirations.



The officials and the upper classes in the town spoke French and were French in their tastes and habits but the great majority of its citizens clung to their national traditions with the tenacity of the conquered. It is Goethe's own testimony that his residence in Strassburg precisely at this period of his life was a decisive circumstance for his future development. At the moment of his arrival, he had not yet completely broken with French models, and he would even appear to have had vague dreams that he would eventually choose the French language as his literary medium.<sup>1</sup> Ever responsive to the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere in which he found himself, however, the intensely German sympathies of his Strassburg circle definitely turned him from a career which would have cut off his genius from its profoundest sources.

His decisive rejection of French for German ideals was the governing fact of his sojourn in Strassburg, but he had other experiences there which show that he was the same variable being as in the Leipzig days. His first letters from his new home would seem to show that he had brought with him something of the pious sentiments he had acquired from his association with Fräulein von Klettenberg, though his expression of them has a singular savour. About a fortnight after his arrival in Strassburg he writes as follows to one Limprecht, a theological student whose acquaintance he had made in Leipzig: "I am now again *Studiosus*, and, thank God, have now as much health as I need, and spirits in superabundance. As I was, so am I still; only that I stand better with our Lord God and with his dear Son Jesus Christ. It follows that I am a somewhat wiser man; and have learned by experience the meaning of the saying, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' To be sure, we first sing Hosanna to Him who cometh yonder; well and good! even that is joy and happiness; the

<sup>1</sup> So we are led to infer from what he says in Part iii., Book ii. of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

King must first enter before He ascends His throne.”<sup>1</sup> A week later he writes again to the same correspondent in a similar strain: “I am a different man, very different: for that I thank my Saviour; and I am thankful also that I am not what I pass for.”<sup>2</sup>

Three months later he would appear to be in the same pious frame of mind. “I still live somewhat at random,” he writes to another correspondent, “and I thank God for it; and often, when I dare, I thank His Son also that I am in circumstances which seem to enjoin this random mode of life. . . . Reflections are very light wares, but prayer is a profitable business; a single welling-up of the heart to Him whom we call a God till we can name Him *our* God, and we are overwhelmed by the multitude of our mercies.”<sup>3</sup>

This mood, we cannot help feeling, sits ill on Goethe; pious as are his expressions, they have not the ring of the genuine believer. Yet it would be unjust to charge him with deliberate hypocrisy. The truth is that at this time, and indeed throughout all his sojourn in Strassburg, he was in a state of nervous irritability of which both himself and his friends were aware.<sup>4</sup> Other expressions in letters of the same date reveal a variability of moods, the only explanation of which is that he had not fully recovered from the depressed mental condition consequent on his long illness in Frankfort. But his unnatural mood of piety did not long withstand the new influences to which he was now subjected, and it is in a letter to Fräulein von Klettenberg herself, written towards the end of August, that he intimates his growing distaste for the religious set to whom she had introduced him in Strassburg. After telling her that he

<sup>1</sup> April 13, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> April 19, 1770.

<sup>3</sup> July 28, 1770.

<sup>4</sup> Lersé, one of Goethe's friends in Strassburg, said: “Da geriet Goethe oft in hohe Verückung, sprach Worte der Prophezeiung, und machte Lersé Besorgnisse, er werde überschnappen.” (Goethe's *Gespräche*. Gesamtausgabe von Freiherrn v. Biedermann, Leipzig, 1909, i. p. 19.)

had been to Holy Communion "to remind him of the sufferings and death of our Lord," he proceeds: "My intercourse with the religious people here is not quite hearty, though at first I did turn very heartily to them; but it seems as if it were not to be. They are so deadly dull when they begin that my natural vivacity cannot endure it." He goes on to say that he has made the acquaintance of one who is of a different way of thinking from these people—one "who from the coolness of blood with which he has always regarded the world thinks he has discovered that we are put in this world for the special purpose of being useful in it; that we are capable of making ourselves so; that religion is of some help in this; and that the most useful man is the best."<sup>1</sup>

The acquaintance to whom Goethe thus refers was the most important person in the circle with which he was mainly associated during his residence in Strassburg. It was a circle widely different in tastes and ways of thinking from that which he had left at Frankfort. Boarded in one house, the persons who composed it, about ten in number, daily met at a common table. Of different ages, and mostly medical students, their talk, as Goethe tells us, mainly turned on their professional studies. The talk of medical students is not favourable to the cultivation of a mystical piety, and it need not surprise us that a few weeks in this atmosphere were sufficient to give Goethe a growing distaste for those religious sentiments which in his case were only a morbid distortion of his natural instincts. Yet during these Strassburg days there is no trace in him of that anti-Christian attitude of mind which was to be one of his later phases. He decisively dissociated himself from the Herrnhut society, and he ceased to speak in their language, but, as we have seen, he was still disposed to assign to religion a due place in the lives of reasonable men.

In the president of the common table, Dr.

<sup>1</sup> August 26, 1770.



Salzmann, the acquaintance to whom he referred, Goethe found one who by his personal character and general views of life appealed to what was deepest in his own nature. Salzmann's belief that "the most useful man is the best," may be said, indeed, to sum up Goethe's own maturest conviction regarding the conduct of life. In his relations to Salzmann, therefore, so far as Goethe's ethical and religious ideals are concerned, we have the clearest light thrown on his Strassburg period. As described by Goethe himself, Salzmann was a man of the world, characterized by a tact, good sense, and personal dignity which gave him an undisputed ascendancy over the miscellaneous company which met at the common table. From another member of the circle<sup>1</sup> we have this additional tribute to Salzmann's high character: "His place (at table) was the uppermost, and that would have been his natural place, even had he sat behind the door. His modesty does not permit me to pass a panegyric on him. . . . Let my readers imagine a philosophy, based at once on feeling and a thorough grasp of principles, conjoined with the most genuine Christianity, and he will have an idea of a Salzmann." Goethe and he, the same writer adds, were "the most cordial friends (*Herzensfreunde*)." In Leipzig the cynical *roué* Behrisch had been Goethe's mentor; in Strassburg his mentor was Salzmann, and the fact emphasizes all the difference between Goethe's Leipzig and Strassburg days. That he chose Salzmann as his chiefest friend and confidant at a period when self-control was still far from his reach, is the proof that *des Lebens ernstes Führen*—the strenuous conduct of life—was in reality, as he himself claimed, an imperative instinct of his nature. Certainly he did not regulate his life in Strassburg in accordance with the maxim of his self-chosen counsellor, yet we may conjecture that but for Salzmann's restraining influence he would have gone further and faster than he actually did. In the extremity of what was to be

<sup>1</sup> Jung Stilling.



his most passionate experience in Strassburg, it was to Salzmann that he poured forth all the tumult of his passion, and the very act of laying bare his heart to such a counsellor was a suggestion of the necessity of a certain measure of self-control. In connection with Goethe's relations to Salzmann we have also to note what is true of his relations to every one at whose feet he chose for the time to sit. When a youth of eighteen he had written to Behrisch, a man of thirty, on terms of perfect equality. He was now a little over twenty, and Salzmann was approaching fifty and a man of the stamp we have seen, yet in Goethe's letters to him there is no trace of the modest diffidence with which a youth usually addresses his seniors. A forward self-confidence, which some found objectionable, was in fact a characteristic of his youth and early manhood which is noticed by more than one observer. He entered a room, we are told, with a bold and confident air; and we have it from another witness that he was *d'une suffisance insupportable*.<sup>1</sup> Be it remarked, however, that there is equal testimony to the overpowering charm of his bearing and conversation—a charm due, as we learn, to a spontaneity of feeling and exuberance of youthful spirits which broke through all conventions and gave the tone to every company in which he found himself.

Goethe's relations to another member of the circle, who joined it somewhat later, show him in his most attractive light. This was Johann Heinrich Jung, better known as Jung Stilling, now about thirty years of age. Stilling was another of those originals who crossed Goethe's path at different periods, and to whom he was at all times specially attracted. Stilling had had a remarkable career; he had been successively charcoal-burner, tailor, schoolmaster, and private tutor, and he had come to Strassburg to qualify himself for the practice of medicine.

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. pp. 15, 19. At an earlier period Goethe was thus described: "Er mag 15 oder 16 Jahr alt sein, im übrigen hat er mehr ein gutes Plappermaul als Gründlichkeit." *Ib.* p. 6.

What attracted Goethe to him was a type of mind and character at every point dissimilar from his own. With a simple mystical piety, which led him to believe that he was a special child of Providence, Stilling combined an intelligence and a zeal for knowledge which gave his words and his actions an individual stamp. It is from Stilling that we have the most vivid description of Goethe in those Strassburg days. As he sat with a friend at the common table for the first time, they saw a youth enter who, by his "large bright eyes, magnificent forehead, handsome person, and confident air," arrested their attention.<sup>1</sup> "That must be a fine fellow," remarked Stilling's friend, but both agreed that they might look for trouble with him, as he seemed *ein wilder Kamerad*. They were mistaken, and Goethe was to prove one of Stilling's warmest friends. Stilling himself relates how, when one at the table directed a gibe at him, it was Goethe who rebuked the railer. When Stilling was in despair at the news of the illness of his betrothed, it was to Goethe he flew for comfort, and he found him a friend in need. At a later date Goethe published Stilling's Autobiography without his knowledge, and presented him with the copyright. It was with the lively recollection of these and other acts of friendship that Stilling wrote the words which are the finest tribute ever paid to

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's personal appearance made such a remarkable impression on all who met him that it deserves to be more minutely described. In stature he was slightly over the middle height, though the poise of his head, both in youth and age, gave the impression of greater tallness. Till past his thirtieth year he was notably slender in figure, a defect in symmetry being the observable shortness of the legs, and he walked with swift, elastic step. The foot was elegantly shaped, but the hand was that of the descendant of ancestors who had been engaged in manual labour. The head was of oval form, the chin small and feminine, the height of the forehead remarkable. The face, which (in youth) gave the impression of smallness, was brown in complexion; the nose was delicately formed and slightly curved; the hair brown, abundant, and usually dishevelled. The feature which struck all who met him for the first time was the eyes, which were brown in colour, large, and widely-opened, with the white conspicuous, and piercingly bright.—An exhaustive study of the portraits and busts of Goethe will be found in *Goethes Kopf und Gestalt* by Karl Baur, Berlin, 1908.

Goethe : "Goethe's heart, which few knew, was as great as his intellect, which all knew."<sup>1</sup>

Neither in Frankfort, nor in Leipzig, nor in Strassburg had Goethe as yet met the man in whom he could recognize his intellectual peer. In the beginning of September, 1770, however, there came to Strassburg one who, for the first time, impressed him with a sense of inferiority. This was Johann Gottfried Herder, who, some five years Goethe's senior, had behind him a career widely different from that of the fortunate son of the Imperial Councillor of Frankfort. Born of poor parents, he had had to fight his way at every step to the distinction which he had already attained. He had studied under Kant at Königsberg, had been successively assistant teacher, assistant pastor, and private tutor. In this last capacity he had travelled in France, and visited Paris, where he had made the acquaintance, among others, of Diderot and D'Alembert. In Hamburg he had for several weeks been in intercourse with Lessing, whom Goethe in a moment of caprice had neglected to visit in Leipzig. Already, moreover, he had produced work in literary criticism which by its suggestiveness and originality had attracted much attention, and notably among the youth of Germany. In hard-won experience, in extent of knowledge and range of ideas, therefore, Herder, as Goethe himself speedily saw and acknowledged, was far ahead of him along those very paths where he himself was ambitious of distinction.

The association of Herder and Goethe in these Strassburg days is one of the interesting chapters in European literary history. Goethe himself bears emphatic testimony to Herder's determining influence at once on his mind and his character. "The most significant event of that time," he tells us, "and one which was to have the weightiest consequences for

<sup>1</sup> Stilling elsewhere says : "Schade, dass so wenige diesen vortrefflichen Menschen seinem Herzen nach kennen !" Others used similar expressions regarding Goethe's mind and heart.



me, was my acquaintance with Herder and the closer bond that resulted from it." Bond there was between them, but it was not the bond of genuine friendship. No two men, indeed, could be more essentially antipathetic by nature than Herder and Goethe. Their antagonism was clearly apparent during their intercourse in Strassburg, and in the end, after many years of uneasy relations, their alienation became complete. Be it said that the traits in Herder which estranged Goethe from him were equally recognized and felt by others. Naturally querulous, splenetic, and inconsiderate of others' feelings, the adverse circumstances of his early life had made him something of a Timon among his fellows.<sup>1</sup> His favourite author was Swift, and from this preference and from the peculiarities of his own temper he was known among his acquaintances as the "Dean." But there were sides to his nature which certainly did not exist in the "terrible" Dean. Herder was an enthusiast for his own ideas, and these ideas were of a quality and range that marked him as one of the pioneers of his time. Religion as a primary instinct in man and the principal factor in his development was Herder's lifelong and predominant interest. He identified himself with Christianity, but it was a Christianity understood by him in the most liberal sense, a Christianity free from dogma, a spirit rather than a creed. As kindred to religion, poetry in his conception was inseparable from it in the essential being of man—poetry not as expressed in conventional forms, but as the breath of the human spirit, and one of the most precious gifts for the purifying and elevation of humanity. These conceptions he owed, not to Kant, to whom he had listened in Königsberg, but to a less systematic teacher, J. G. Hamann, whose eccentric

<sup>1</sup> R. Haym, Herder's biographer, says of him: "Einen unbedingt erfreulichen, harmonischen Eindruck kann dieser Mann, der selbst von den 'gräulichen Dissonanzen' redet, in die seine Aeusserungen zuweilen ausklingen möchten, auch auf den günstigst gestimmten Betrachter nimmermehr machen." (*Herder nach seinem Leben und seinen Werken*, Berlin, 1887, i. p. 396.)



character and visionary speculations had gained for him the designation of the "Magus of the North." Goethe came to be acquainted with the writings of Hamann, and had a genuine admiration of him as a seer struggling with visions to which he was unable to give adequate utterance.<sup>1</sup> It was in his conversations with Herder, however, that he was introduced to those deeper conceptions of man and his possibilities which implied a complete emancipation from the mechanical philosophy which he had hitherto been endeavouring to find in mystical religion.

During the six months that Herder resided in Strassburg he was under treatment for a serious ailment of his eyes, and Goethe was assiduous in his attendance on him, often remaining with him for whole days. Their intercourse was not an unmixed pleasure for either. Herder's mordant humour and spirit of contradiction were a daily trial to Goethe's temper, and he describes his feelings of alternating attraction and repulsion as a wholly new experience in his life. Herder, who had known Diderot and D'Alembert and Lessing, appears, indeed, to have treated Goethe as an undisciplined boy, spoilt by flattery, with no serious purpose in life, inconsequent and irresponsible.<sup>2</sup> Nor does he seem to have been specially impressed by any promise in the youth who was so completely to eclipse him in the eyes of the world. In his letters from Strassburg he does not even mention Goethe's name; and, when he subsequently referred to him, it was in terms he might have applied to any clever and confident youth. "Goethe," he wrote, "is at bottom a good fellow, only somewhat superficial and sparrow-like,<sup>3</sup> faults with which I constantly taxed him." If Herder's moods frequently jarred on Goethe, it is evident that the experience was mutual. The physical and

<sup>1</sup> Goethe attached so much importance to many of Hamann's utterances that, as late as 1806, he had thoughts of bringing out an edition of Hamann's works.

<sup>2</sup> Herder thought that Goethe was lacking in enthusiasm.

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere Herder calls Goethe a *Specht*, a wood-pecker.

mental restlessness, which is suggested by the epithet "sparrow-like," and which was noted by others as characteristic of Goethe at this period, could not fail to irritate one like Herder, naturally grave, sobered by hard experience, and then suffering from a painful and serious ailment. Equally distasteful to Herder were Goethe's explosive outbursts in general conversation and his liking for practical jokes at the expense of his friends. To Herder, as to every one else, Goethe aired his opinions with the "frank confidingness" which he notes as a trait of his own character, and which gave Herder frequent opportunities for scathing criticism. Herder giped at his youthful tastes—at his collection of seals, at his elegantly bound volumes which stood unread on his shelves, at his enthusiasms for Italian art, for the writings of the cabbalists, for the poetry of Ovid.<sup>1</sup>

At bottom, as Herder said, Goethe was a "good fellow," slow to take offence, and as little vindictive as is possible to human nature. This easy temper doubtless stood him in good stead under the fire of Herder's sarcasms, but he himself specifies another reason for his docility which is equally characteristic: he endured all Herder's satirical spleen because he had learned to attach a high value to everything that contributed to his own culture. According to his own account, he owed a double debt to Herder—a determining influence on his character, and an equally determining influence on his intellectual development. Till he met Herder he had been treated as a youthful genius, as a "conquering lord," whose eccentricities were only a proof of his originality. Very different was the measure he received from Herder, who showed no mercy for "whatever of self-complacency, egotism, vanity, pride and presumption was latent or active" in him. Herder, he says elsewhere, "exercised such a blighting influence on me that I began to doubt my own powers." Whether

<sup>1</sup> Writing to a correspondent in 1780, Goethe says: "Herder fährt fort, sich und andern das Leben sauer zu machen."

or not Goethe learned from Herder the lesson of modesty regarding his own gifts, it is the truth that of all the sons of genius none has been freer than Goethe was in his maturer years from every form of vanity and self-consciousness.

It is on his intellectual debt to Herder, however, that Goethe dwells most emphatically in his account of their personal intercourse. Daily and even hourly, he says, Herder's conversation was a summons to new points of view. Poetry was the subject in which both had a common interest, and from Herder Goethe learned to regard poetry "in another sense" from that in which he had hitherto regarded it. He had hitherto regarded poetry as an accomplishment; Herder taught him that it was a gift of nature, of the essence of humanity, "the mother-speech of the human race." This expression was Hamann's, who had been inspired to utter it out of his revulsion against French literature and his study of the literature of England. From England, indeed, came those conceptions of the nature and function of poetry which, as expounded and exemplified in the writings of Hamann, Herder, Goethe and others, were to effect a revolution in German literature. In a literary manifesto, written by an Englishman, but apparently better known in Germany than in England, German historians of their own literature have found the main impulse that gave occasion to this revolution. This manifesto was a pamphlet written by Edward Young, the author of *Night Thoughts*, and entitled *Conjectures on Original Composition, in a Letter addressed to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison*. The dithyrambic style of the Letter manifestly exercised a powerful influence on the prose of Herder and Goethe—prose charged with perfervid feeling, and hitherto unknown in German literature. Young's main contention is that in literature genius must make rules for itself, and that imitation is suicidal. "Genius," he says, "can set us right in composition, without the rules of the learned; as conscience sets



us right in life, without the laws of the land." He lays it down as a maxim that "the less we copy the renowned ancients, we shall resemble them the more." The two golden rules in composition as in ethics are: know thyself, and reverence thyself. Such were the "conjectures on original composition," expounded to him by Herder, which led Goethe to regard poetry in "another sense" from that in which he had hitherto understood it. And in confirmation of his views Herder directed him to the exemplars where he would find their illustration—to the Bible, to Homer and Pindar, to Shakespeare and Ossian, and, above all, to the primitive poetry of all peoples.

As we shall see, Goethe laid these counsels even too faithfully to heart; the first composition<sup>1</sup> in which he attempted to realize them drew upon him Herder's characteristic censure. And it is in this connection that we have to note the reserves which Goethe makes in the acknowledgment of his debt to Herder. "Had Herder been more methodical in his mental habit," he says, "he would have afforded the most valuable guidance for the permanent direction of my culture; but he was more disposed to probe and to stimulate than to give guidance and leading." So it was, as Goethe adds elsewhere, that the result of Herder's influence on him was a mental confusion and tumult, plainly visible in another of his early writings,<sup>2</sup> where "quite simple thoughts and observations are veiled in a dust-cloud of unusual words and phrases."

The homage which Goethe pays to Herder in the retrospect of his Strassburg days is equally emphasized in his contemporary letters. "Herder, Herder," he writes in one place, "remain to me what you are. If I am destined to be your planet I will be it; be it willingly, faithfully."<sup>3</sup> Yet we may doubt whether Herder's influence was, in truth, so determining a factor in his life as Goethe himself represents

<sup>1</sup> *Götz von Berlichingen.*

<sup>2</sup> *Von deutscher Baukunst.*

<sup>3</sup> Summer of 1771. He adds that he would prefer to be Mercury, the least of the seven satellites that revolve round the sun, than first among the five that revolve round Saturn.



it. Herder, he tells us, first taught him a wise self-distrust, but we have seen that one of the lessons he professes to have learned from Oeser was "to be modest without self-depreciation, and to be proud without presumption." Before he saw Herder, also, he had already divined the greatness of Shakespeare and the futility of Voltaire's criticisms of him. Herder's ideas regarding the human spirit and its possibilities were in the air, and, had the two men never met, the probability is that Goethe's development would not have been different from what it actually was. Herder's general views were already incipient in him; and what Herder did was to deepen and intensify them.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the collision for the first time with a mind that revealed to him his own immaturity was for Goethe, as for every youth, a formative influence of the highest import and an epoch in his mental history. Yet in his association with Herder one fact has to be noted: Goethe was not subjugated by him. He frankly recognized Herder's superiority to himself in knowledge and experience, but he retained his mental independence. In his letters to Herder, as in those to Salzmann, he writes in terms of equality. In such words as the following, for example, we have not the attitude of the unquestioning disciple to his master. "Pray let us try to see each other oftener. You feel how you would embrace one who could be to you what you are to me. Don't let us be frightened like weaklings because we must often disagree: should our passions collide, can we not endure the collision?"<sup>2</sup> Might we not infer from this passage that not Herder but Goethe was the dominating spirit in their intercourse?<sup>3</sup>

Goethe found another source of inspiration in

<sup>1</sup> Herder himself says of his influence on Goethe: "Ich glaube ihm, ohne Lobrednerei, einige gute Eindrücke gegeben zu haben, die einmal wirksam werden können."—Haym, *op. cit.* i. 392.

<sup>2</sup> Middle of July, 1772.

<sup>3</sup> Schiller, in a letter to C. G. Körner, the father of the poet, writes (July, 1787): "He [Herder] said that Goethe had greatly influenced his intellectual development."

Strassburg besides Herder, and one which, as he describes it both in his Autobiography and in a contemporary effusion, moved him even more powerfully. His first act on his arrival in Strassburg, he tells us, was to visit its cathedral whose towers had caught his eye long before he reached the town. He had been taught by his old master Oeser, who only represented the general opinion of the time in Germany, that Gothic architecture was the product of a barbarous age and could be regarded only with amazed disgust by every person of educated taste. But Goethe's mystical studies and religious experiences in Frankfort had not left him what he was in his Leipzig days, and had given him an insight into movements of the human spirit which did not come within the cognizance of Oeser. It was with predisposed sympathy, therefore, that he looked for the first time on a specimen of Gothic architecture in its most august form. His first impression was of "a wholly peculiar kind"; and, without seeking to analyse the impression, "he surrendered himself to its silent working." Thenceforward, during his stay in Strassburg, the cathedral exercised a fascination upon him that evoked a new world of thought and feeling. It was his delight to ascend its tower at sunset and gaze on the rich landscape of Alsace, whose beauty made him bless the fate that had placed him for a time amid such surroundings. He studied its structure with such minute care that he correctly divined the additions to the great tower which the original architect had contemplated, but which he had been unable to carry out.

Goethe has himself indicated how the impressions he received from the cathedral influenced his first literary productions which bore the stamp of his individuality. It formed a fitting background, he says, for such poetical creations as *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Faust*. To the cathedral and its suggestions, even more than to Herder, perhaps, we should trace the inspiration that produced these works—the

former of which met with Herder's questioning approval. To the full force of that inspiration Goethe gave direct expression in a composition which is the most characteristic product of his Strassburg period—a short essay, entitled *Of German Architecture*. Probably sketched in Strassburg, it was not published till his return to Frankfort. Its rhapsodical style, as well as the conceptions of art and nature which it embodies, directly recall Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*. Like Young he proclaims that genius is a law to itself, that all imitation and subservience to rule is disastrous to imaginative production. "Principles," he declares, "are even more injurious to genius than examples." The burden of the Essay is the glorification of the genius of the architect of Strassburg cathedral, and of Gothic architecture in general, which, Goethe maintained, should be correctly designated "German" architecture, as having had its origin on German soil. With this youthful sally of Goethe, time was to deal with its unkindest irony. Later research has proved that Gothic architecture is of French and not of German origin, and Goethe himself did not remain faithful to his youthful enthusiasm. On his way home from Strassburg, he relates, the sight of some specimens of ancient art in Mannheim "shook his faith in northern architecture," and the impression he thus received was to become a permanent conviction. It was in the art of classical antiquity that he was to find the expression of his maturest ideal; when in later years his attention was temporarily turned to Gothic architecture, it was with little of his youthful enthusiasm that he admitted its claim to our regard.

"I cannot go on long without a passion," Goethe wrote in his twenty-third year, and we have no difficulty in believing him. In Strassburg he lived through a passion which was to be the occasion of his giving the first clear proof to the world that he was to be among its original poets. On October 14,



1770, more than five months after his arrival in Strassburg, he wrote these words to a correspondent<sup>1</sup>: "I have never so vividly experienced what it is to be content with one's heart disengaged as now here in Strassburg." In the same letter in which those words occur he casually mentions that he has just spent a few days in the country with some pleasant people. These pleasant people were a pastor Brion and his family living at Sesenheim, an Alsace village some twenty miles from Strassburg. The few days spent with the Brion family were to be the beginning of a history which, as Goethe relates it in his *Autobiography*, has the character of an idyll, but which, when stripped of the poetic haze which he has thrown around it, is not far from tragedy. He himself is our sole authority for its incidents, and he chose so to tell them that the exact truth of the whole history can never be known.<sup>2</sup>

The day following the writing of the letter just quoted, Goethe wrote another letter which proves that his heart was no longer "disengaged." This letter is, in fact, a declaration of love to the youngest daughter of the Sesenheim pastor, Friederike—name of pleasantest suggestions in the long list of Goethe's loves. The letter, it may be said, does not strike us as a happy introduction to the relations that were to follow; it would not have been written had Friederike been the daughter of a house of the same social standing as his own. All through his relations to the Sesenheim family, indeed, there is an unpleasant suggestion that it is the son of the Imperial Councillor who is indulging a passion which he is fully aware must one day end in a more or less bitter parting. "Dear new Friend," he begins, "Such I

<sup>1</sup> Probably Katharina Fabricius.

<sup>2</sup> Subsequent investigation has proved that Goethe has committed several errors of fact in his narrative. For example, he relates that on his first visit to the Sesenheim family he was vividly reminded of the family of the Vicar of Wakefield. In point of fact, he was introduced to Goldsmith's work by Herder, who came to Strassburg subsequent to Goethe's first visit to Sesenheim.

do not hesitate to call you, for, if in other circumstances I have not much insight into the language of the eyes, at the first glance I saw in yours the hope of this friendship; and for our hearts I would swear. How should you, tender and good as I know you to be, not be a little partial to me in return?"<sup>1</sup> In this strain the letter continues, and with a skill of approach that reminds us of his boast to his former confidant Behrisch.

Goethe's relations with Friederike lasted till the end of June, 1771—a period of some ten months. Of this period the first half would seem to have been passed by both in idyllic oblivion of consequences; during the second there came painful awakening to realities on the part of one of the lovers. As they lived in his memory, those first months that Goethe spent in intercourse with the Sesenheim circle were a long dream of happiness; and nowhere in his Autobiography is he so obviously moved by his recollection of the past.<sup>2</sup> The picture he has drawn of that time is, indeed, an idyll in every sense. We have the setting of a primitive home in a country Arcadian in its bountifulness and beauty; in the centre of this home is the father, whose simple piety is in perfect keeping with his office and his surroundings; and the home is brightened by the presence of two daughters,<sup>3</sup> the one of whom, Friederike, appears as a vision of rustic grace and modest maidenhood. In the midst of this circle moves the richly-gifted youth, laying under a spell father, daughters, and all who come within the magnetism of his presence. In no other situation, indeed, are the attractive sides of Goethe's character so strikingly manifest as in his intercourse with the Sesenheim family and the friendly group attached to them. It is without a touch of

<sup>1</sup> October 15, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> It is recorded that his voice trembled as he dictated the passages referring to Sesenheim and Friederike.

<sup>3</sup> In reality, there were four daughters, but Goethe omits mention of the other two in order to make more striking the resemblance between the family of the Vicar of Wakefield and that of Sesenheim.

egotism that he brings himself before us in all the buoyant spirits, the quickness of sympathy, the diversity of interests, the splendour of his gifts, which made Wieland speak of him as "a veritable ruler of spirits." He humours the good father by drawing a plan for a new parsonage and painting his coach, he charms the daughters by his various accomplishments, and the neighbours who came about the parsonage are carried away by his frolicsome humour. "When Goethe came among us girls when we were at work in the barn," related one who had seen him, "his jests and droll stories almost made work impossible."<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of disillusion came on the occasion of a visit made by the two sisters to Strassburg. In a world that was alien to her Friederike lost something of the charm which was derived from her perfect fitness to her native surroundings, and it was brought home to Goethe that there must be a rude awakening from the dream of the last few months. In May, 1771, he paid a visit to Sesenheim which lasted several weeks, and the picture we have of his state of mind during his visit shows that he felt that the time of reckoning had come. His mind was already clear that he and Friederike must separate, but he was fully conscious that he was playing a sorry part. Exaggerated language was such an inveterate habit with him at this period of his life that it is difficult to know with what exactness his words express his real feelings.<sup>2</sup> That he was unhappy, however, we cannot doubt, make what reserves we may for rhetorical excesses of style. Here are a few passages from letters addressed to his friend Salzmann during his stay at Sesenheim: "It rains without and within, and the hateful evening

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> In the recently discovered manuscript of *Wilhelm Meister's Theatralische Sendung* occurs this passage, evidently self-descriptive: "Als Knabe hatte er zu grossen prächtigen Worten und Sprüchen eine ausserordentliche Liebe, er schmückte seine Seele damit aus wie mit einem köstlichen Kleide, und freute sich darüber, als wenn sie zu ihm selbst gehörten, kindisch über diesen äussern Schmuck."



winds rustle among the vine leaves before my window, and my *animula vagula* is like yonder weather-cock on the church tower." "For the honour of God I am not leaving this place just at present. . . . I am now certainly in tolerably good health; my cough, as the result of treatment and exercise, is pretty nearly gone, and I hope it will soon go altogether. Things about me, however, are not very bright; the little one [Friederike] continues sadly ill, and that makes everything look out of joint—not to speak of *conscia mens*, unfortunately not *recti*, which I carry about with me." "It is now about time that I should return [to Strassburg]; I will and will, but what avails willing in the presence of the faces I see around me? The state of my heart is strange, and my health is as variable as usual in the world, which it is long since I have seen so beautiful. The most delightful country, people who love me, a round of pleasures! Are not the dreams of thy childhood all fulfilled?—I often ask myself when my eye feeds on this circumambient bliss. Are not these the fairy gardens after which thy heart yearned? They are! They are! I feel it, dear friend; and feel that we are not a whit the happier when our desires are realized. The make-weight! the make-weight! with which Fate balances every bliss that we enjoy. Dear friend, there needs much courage not to lose courage in this world of ours."<sup>1</sup>

The day of parting came at the end of June; on August 6th he passed the tests necessary for the Licentiate of Laws, and at the end of that month he left Strassburg for home. He left Friederike, he tells us, at a moment when their parting almost cost her her life<sup>2</sup>; did he do her a greater wrong than his own narrative would imply? We cannot tell; but one thing is certain, from the first he never intended marriage. That he had pangs of self-reproach for

<sup>1</sup> Apparently all written in June, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> Friederike died in 1815. She was still alive when Goethe was writing the story of their love.

the part he had played, his words above quoted may be taken as sufficient evidence, but alike from temperament and deliberate consideration of the facts of life he was incapable of the contrition that troubles human nature to its depths.<sup>1</sup> Yet in our judgment of him it is well to remember the ideas then current in Germany regarding the relation between love and marriage. In his seventy-fourth year Goethe himself said: "Love is something ideal, marriage is something real; and never with impunity do we exchange the ideal for the real." The severest of moralists, Kant, was of the same opinion. "The word *conjugium* itself," he says, "implies that two married people are yoked together, and to be thus yoked cannot be called bliss." And to the same purport Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the finest spirits of his time, declared that "marriage was no bond of souls." It was in a world where such opinions were entertained by men of the highest character and intelligence that Goethe made his irresponsible addresses to the successive objects of his passion.

The distractions of Strassburg, no more than the distractions of Leipzig, diverted Goethe from what were his ruling instincts from the beginning—to know life, and to be master of himself. As in Leipzig, his professional studies in Strassburg held little place in his thoughts; his law degree, he tells us, he regarded as a matter of "secondary importance." The subject he chose as his thesis—the obligation of magistrates to impose a State religion binding on all their subjects—was of a nature that had no living interest for him at any period of his life, and he wrote the thesis "only to satisfy his father." If his law studies were neglected, however, it was almost with feverish passion that he coursed through other fields of knowledge. In the *Ephemerides*—a diary which he kept in Strassburg

<sup>1</sup> Nichts taugt Ungeduld,  
Noch weniger Reue;  
Jene vermehrt die Schuld,  
Diese schafft neue.

and in which he noted his random thoughts and the books that happened to be engaging him—we can see the range of his reading and the scope of his interests. Occultism, metaphysics, science in many departments, literature ancient and modern, all in turn absorbed his attention, suggesting a mental state impatient of the limits of the human faculties—the state of mind which he was afterwards so marvellously to reproduce in his *Faust*.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the conversation of the medical students who met at the common table, as well as by his own natural bent, he attended the university lectures on chemistry and anatomy, and thus laid a solid foundation for his subsequent original investigations in these sciences. Extensive travels in the surrounding country were among the chief pleasures of his sojourn in Strassburg, and these travels, as was the case with him always, were voyages of discovery. Architecture, machinery, works of engineering, Roman antiquities, the native ballads of the district—on all he turned an equally curious eye, and with such vivid impressions that they remained in his memory after the lapse of half a lifetime.

In Goethe the instinct for self-mastery was as remarkable as his instinct for knowledge. As the result of his illness in Frankfort, his organs of sense were in a state of morbid susceptibility which “put him out of harmony with himself, with objects around him, and even with the elements.” It throws a curious light on the nature of the man that amid all the preoccupations of his mind and heart in Strassburg he could deliberately turn his thoughts to the cure of his jarred nerves. Loud sounds disturbed him, and to deaden the sensitiveness of his ears he attended the evening tataroo; to cure himself of a tendency to giddiness he practised climbing the cathedral; partly to rid himself of a repugnance to repulsive sights he attended clinical lectures; and by a similar course of discipline he so completely delivered himself from

<sup>1</sup> “I, too,” Goethe wrote in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, “had trodden the path of knowledge, and had early been led to see the vanity of it.”



"night fears" that he afterwards found it difficult to realize them even in imagination.

In his old age Goethe said of himself: "I have that in me which, if I allowed it to go unchecked, would ruin both myself and those about me." Was it, as Goethe would have us believe, by sheer purposive will that he kept this dangerous element in him under check and saved himself at critical moments from disaster? When we regard his life as a whole, the actual facts hardly justify such a conclusion. Nature had given him two safeguards which, without any effort of will on his own part, assured him deliverance where the risk of wreckage was greatest—a consuming desire to *know* which grew with every year of his life, and a versatility of temperament which necessitated ever-renewed sensations equally of the mind and the heart. Of the working of these two elements in him we have already had illustration; they will receive further illustration as we proceed.

It would be within the truth to say that the period of Goethe's sojourn in Strassburg was the most memorable epoch of his life. During the eighteen months he spent there he received an intellectual stimulus from which we may date his dedication to the unique career before him, in which self-culture, the passion for knowledge, and the impulse to produce were all commensurate ends. Moreover, as has already been said, it was in Strassburg that his genius found its first adequate expression. And, what is worth noting in the case of one who was to range over so many fields, it was in lyric poetry that his genius first expressed itself. The problem with Goethe is, to discover which among his various gifts was nature's special dowry to him. What, at least, is true is that at different periods of his life he produced numbers of lyrics which the world has recognized as among the most perfect things of their kind. And among these perfect things are the few songs and other pieces inspired by Friederike Brion. Doubtless his genius would have flowered had he

never seen Friederike, but it was among the many kind offices that fortune did him that he found the theme for his muse in one whose simple charm, while it excited his passion, at the same time chastened and purified it, and compelled a truthful simplicity of expression in keeping with her own nature. It was to Friederike that Goethe owed the pure inspiration which gives his verses to her a quality rare in lyric poetry, but to the writing of them there went all the forces that were then working in him. In these verses we have the conclusive proof that he now both understood and felt poetry "in another sense" from that in which he had hitherto understood and felt it. Through them we feel the breath of another air than that which he had breathed when he strained his invention to make poetic compliments to Käthchen Schönkopf. In the intensity and directness of passion which they express we may trace all the new poetic influences which he had come under in Strassburg—Shakespeare, Ossian, the popular ballad, the inspiration of Herder. What is remarkable in these early lyrics, however, is that though they vibrate with the emotion of the poet, the emotion is under strict restraint and never passes into the watery effusiveness which is the inherent sin of so much German lyrical poetry. That "brevity and precision," which was the ideal he now put before him, he had attained at one bound, and in none of his later work did he exemplify it in greater perfection. As his countrymen have frequently pointed out, these firstfruits of Goethe's genius mark a new departure in lyrical poetry. In them we have the direct simplicity of the best lyrics of the past, but combined with this simplicity a depth of introspection and a fusion of nature with human feeling, which is a new content in the imaginative presentation of human experience. In connection with Goethe's Leipzig period we gave a specimen of the best work he was then capable of producing; when we place beside it such a poem as the following, we are reminded of the saying of Emerson that "the soul's advances are not

made by gradation . . . but rather by ascension of state."

### WILLKOMMEN UND ABSCHIED

Es schlug mein Herz ; geschwind zu Pferde,  
Und fort, wild, wie ein Held zur Schlacht !  
Der Abend wiegte schon die Erde,  
Und an den Bergen hing die Nacht ;  
Schon stund im Nebelkleid die Eiche,  
Wie ein getürmter Riese da,  
Wo Finsterniss aus dem Gesträuche  
Mit hundert schwarzen Augen sah.

Der Mond von einem Wolkenhügel  
Sah kläglich aus dem Duft hervor ;  
Die Winde schwangen leise Flügel,  
Umsausten schauerlich mein Ohr ;  
Die Nacht schuf tausend Ungeheuer ;  
Doch frisch und fröhlich war mein Mut ;  
In meinen Adern welches Feuer !  
In meinem Herzen welche Glut !

Dich sah ich, und die milde Freude  
Floss aus dem süßen Blick auf mich,  
Ganz war mein Herz an deiner Seite,  
Und jeder Athemzug für dich.  
Ein rosenfarbnes Frühlingswetter  
Umgab das liebliche Gesicht,  
Und Zärtlichkeit für mich, ihr Götter !  
Ich hofft' es, ich verdient' es nicht.

Doch ach, schon mit der Morgensonne  
Verengt der Abschied mir das Herz :  
In deinen Küssen, welche Wonne,  
In deinem Auge, welcher Schmerz !  
Ich ging, du standst und sahst zur Erden,  
Und sahst mir nach mit nassem Blick ;  
Und doch, welch Glück geliebt zu werden !  
Und lieben, Götter, welch ein Glück !

### WELCOME AND PARTING

Throbb'd high my breast ! To horse, to horse !  
Raptured as hero for the fight ;  
Soft lay the earth in eve's embrace,  
And on the mountain brooded night.  
The oak, a dim-discovered shape,  
Did, like a towering giant, rise—  
There whence from forth the thicket glared  
Black darkness with its myriad eyes.



From out a pile of cloud the moon  
Peered sadly through the misty veil ;  
Softly the breezes waved their wings,  
Sighed in my ears with plaintive wail.  
Night shaped a thousand monstrous forms ;  
Yet fresh and frolicsome my breast ;  
And what a fire burned in my veins,  
And what a glow my heart possessed !

I saw thee : in thine eye's soft gaze  
A tender, calm delight I knew ;  
All motions of my heart were thine,  
And thine was every breath I drew.  
The freshest, richest hues of Spring  
Enhaloëd thy lovely face,—  
And tenderest thoughts for me !—my hope !  
But, undeserved, ye Powers of Grace !

But, ah ! too soon, with morning's dawn,  
The hour of parting cramps my heart ;  
Then, in thy kisses, O what bliss !  
And in thine eye, what poignant smart !  
I went ; thou stood'st and downward gazed,  
Gazed after me with tearful eyes ;  
Yet, to be loved, what blessedness,  
And, oh ! to love, ye Gods, what bliss !

## CHAPTER V

### FRANKFORT—GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN

AUGUST, 1771—DECEMBER, 1771

GOETHE returned to Frankfort at the end of August, 1771, and, with the exception of two memorable intervals, he remained there till November, 1775, when he left it, never again to make it his permanent home. This period of four years and two months is in creative productiveness unparalleled in his own career, and is probably without a parallel in literary history. During these years he produced *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werther*, both of which works, whatever their merits or demerits, are at least landmarks, in the history not only of German, but of European literature. To the same period belong the original scenes of *Faust*, in which he displayed a richness of imagination with a spontaneity of passion, of thought and of feeling, to which he never attained in the subsequent additions he made to the poem. In these scenes are already clearly defined the two figures, Faust and Mephistopheles, which have their place in the world's gallery of imaginative creations beside Ulysses and Don Quixote, Hamlet and Falstaff; and there, too, in all her essential lineaments, we have Gretchen, the most moving of all the births of a poet's mind and heart. And, besides these three works of universal interest, there belong to the same period a series of productions—plays, lyrics, essays—which, though at a lower level of inspiration, were sufficient to mark their author as an original genius with a compass of thought and imagination hitherto

unexampled in the literature of his country. Had Goethe died at the age of twenty-six, he would have left behind him a legacy which would have assured him a place with the great creative minds of all time.

This extraordinary productiveness of itself implies an intellectual and spiritual ferment which receives further illustration from the poet's letters written during the same period. In these letters we have the expression of a mind distracted by contending emotions and conflicting aims, now in sanguine hope, now paralysed with a sense of impotence to adjust itself to the inexorable conditions under which life had to be lived. Moods of thinking and feeling follow each other with a rapidity of contrast which are bewildering to the reader and hardly permit him to draw any certain inference as to the real import of what is written. In one effusion we have lachrymose sentiment which suggests morbid self-relaxation; in another, a bitter cynicism equally suggestive of ill-regulated emotions. We have moods of piety and moods in which the mental attitude towards all human aspirations can only be described as Mephistophelian.

Goethe himself was well aware of a congenital morbid strain in him which all through his life demanded careful control if he were to avert bodily and mental collapse. And at no period of his life did external conditions and inward experiences combine to put his self-control to a severer test than during these last years in Frankfort. Frankfort itself, as we shall see, had become more distasteful to him than ever, and his abiding feeling towards it, now as subsequently, was that he could not breathe freely in its atmosphere. On his return from Strassburg his father received him with greater cordiality than on his return from Leipzig, but the lack of real sympathy between them remained, and was undoubtedly one of the permanent sources of Goethe's discontent with his native town. With no interest in his nominal profession, he had at the same time



no clear conception of the function to which his genius called him. Throughout these years in Frankfort he continued uncertain whether Nature meant him for a poet or an artist, and we receive the impression that his ambition was to be artist rather than poet. From the varied literary forms in which he expressed himself, also, we are led to infer that in the domain of literature he was still only feeling his way.

If the diversity of his gifts thus distracted him, his emotional experiences, it will appear, were not more favourable to a settled aim and purpose. One paroxysm of passion succeeded another, with the result that he was eventually, in self-preservation, driven to make a complete breach with his past, and to seek deliverance in a new set of conditions under which he might attain the self-control after which he had hitherto vainly striven. This prolonged conflict with himself was doubtless primarily due to his own inherited temperament, but it was also in large measure owing to the character of the society and of the time in which the period of his youth was passed. Had he been born half a century earlier—that is to say, in a time when the current speculation was bound up with a mechanical philosophy, and when the limits of emotion were conditioned by strict conventional standards—he might have been a youth of eccentric humours, but the morbid fancies and wandering affections that consumed him could not have come within his experience. But, by the time when he began to think and feel, Rousseau had written and opened the flood-gates of the emotions, and Sterne had shown how accepted conventions might appear in the light of a capricious wit and fancy which probed the surface of things. In Goethe's letters, which are the most direct revelation of his mental and moral condition during the period, the influence of Rousseau and Sterne is visible on every page, and the fact has to be remembered in drawing any conclusions as to the real state of his mind from his language to his various correspondents. The fashion

of giving exaggerated expression to every emotion was, in fact, the convention of the day, and we find it in all the correspondence, of both the men and women of the time. That it was in large degree forced and artificial and must be interpreted with due reserves, will appear in the case of Goethe himself.

There are three critical epochs during these Frankfort years, each marked by a central event which resulted in new developments of Goethe's character and genius. In the period between his return to Frankfort in August, 1771, and May, 1772, was written the first draft of *Götz von Berlichingen*, the eventual publication of which made him the most famous author in Germany. During these months the memories of Strassburg are fresh in his mind, and the recollection of Friederike and the teaching of Herder are his chief sources of inspiration. In May, 1772, he went to Wetzlar, where, during a residence of three months, he passed through another emotional experience which, two years later, found expression in *Werther*, of still more resounding notoriety than *Götz*. The opening of 1775 saw him entangled in a new affair of the heart of another nature than those which had preceded it, and resulting in a mental turmoil that drove him to seek deliverance in a new field of life and action. There were other incidents and other experiences that moved him less or more during this period of his career, but it is in connection with these three central events that his character and his genius are presented in their fullest light, and are best known to the world.

We have it on Goethe's own testimony that, on his return from Strassburg to Frankfort, he was healthier in body and more composed in mind than on his return from Leipzig two years before. Still, he adds, he was conscious of a sense of tension in his nature which implied that his mind had not completely recovered its normal balance. So he writes in his Autobiography, and his contemporary letters

fully bear out his memories of the period. He certainly returned from Strassburg with a more satisfactory record than from Leipzig. He had actually completed the necessary legal studies, and was now Licentiate of Laws. His *Disputation* had won the approval of his father, who was even prepared to go to the expense of publishing it. In his son's purely literary efforts during his Strassburg sojourn, also, he showed an undisguised pleasure, and he would evidently have been quite content to have seen him combine eminence in his profession with distinction in literature. When Goethe, therefore, immediately on his arrival in the paternal home, took the necessary steps to qualify himself for legal practice, it seemed that the father's ambition for his wayward son was at length about to be realized.<sup>1</sup> But the apparent reconciliation of their respective aims was based on no cordial understanding, and the son, it is evident, made no special effort to adapt himself to his father's idiosyncrasies. An incident related by himself illustrates curiously his careless disregard of the conventions of the family home. On his way from Strassburg he picked up a boy-harper who had interested him, and seriously thought of making him a member of the household. The reconciling mother realized the absurdity of lodging in the mansion of an Imperial Rath a strolling musician, who would have to earn his living by daily visits to the taverns of the town, and she met her son's good-humoured whim by finding a home for the boy in more fitting quarters. These noble bohemian humours of his son, which, as we shall see, displayed themselves in other unconventional habits, were not likely to propitiate a father who, as we are told, "leading a contented life amid his ancient hobbies and pursuits, was comfortably at ease, like one who has carried out his plans in spite

<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, only two legal cases passed through Goethe's hands during the first seven months after his return. During the later period of his stay in Frankfort he was more busily engaged with law.



of all hindrances and delays." In point of fact, as during Goethe's former sojourn at home, his estrangement from his father increased from year to year, and he came to speak of him with a bitterness which proves that, for a time at least, any kindly feeling that existed between them was effaced.

Again, as after his return from Leipzig, it was his sister Cornelia who made home in any degree tolerable for the brother whom she alone of the family was sufficiently sympathetic and sufficiently instructed fully to understand. She had gathered round her a circle of attractive and educated women, of whom she was the dominating spirit, and in whose company her brother, always appreciative of feminine society, now found a congenial atmosphere. Associated with the circle were certain men with kindred interests, among whom Goethe specially names the two brothers Schlosser as esteemed counsellors.<sup>1</sup> Both were accomplished men of the world, the one a jurist, the other engaged in the public service; and both were keenly interested in literature. It was a peculiarity of Goethe, even into advanced life, that he seems always to have required a mentor,—whose counsels he nevertheless might or might not choose to follow. At this time it was the elder of these two brothers who played this part, and Goethe testifies that he received from him the sagest of advice, which, however, he was prevented from following by "a thousand varying distractions, moods, and passions."

What these distractions were is vividly revealed in his correspondence of the time. First, his whole being was in disaccord with the social, religious, and intellectual atmosphere of Frankfort; he felt himself cribbed, cabined, and confined in all the aspirations of his nature; and the future seemed to offer no prospect of more favouring conditions. Two months after his return he communicates to his friend Salzmann in Strassburg his sense of oppression

<sup>1</sup> The younger brother, Georg, subsequently married Cornelia.

in his present surroundings. Arduous intellectual effort is necessary to him, he writes, "for it is dreary to live in a place where one's whole activity must simmer within itself. . . . For the rest, everything around me is dead. . . . Frankfort remains the nest it was—*nidus*, if you will. Good enough for hatching birds; to use another figure, *spelunca*, a wretched hole. God help us out of this misery. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

In himself, also, there was a turmoil of thoughts and emotions which, apart from depressing surroundings, was sufficient to occasion alternating moods of exaltation and despair. The upbraiding memory of Friederike pursued him, and we may take it that in his Autobiography he faithfully records his continued self-reproach for his abrupt desertion of her. "Friederike's reply to a written adieu lacerated my heart. It was the same hand, the same mind, the same feeling that had been educed in her to me and through me. For the first time I now realized the loss she suffered, and saw no way of redressing or even of alleviating it. Her whole being was before me; I continually felt the want of her; and, what is worse, I could not forgive myself my own unhappiness." We may ascribe it either to delicacy of feeling or to the consideration that their further intercourse was undesirable, that he ceased to communicate directly with her. A drawing by his own hand, which he thought would give her pleasure, he sends to her through Salzmann, who is requested to forward it with or without a note, as he thinks best. Through the same hands he sends to her a play (*Götz von Berlichingen*), in which a lover plays a sorry part, and adds the comment that "Friederike will find herself to some extent consoled if the faithless one is poisoned."

But the profoundest source of his unrest was neither the distastefulness of Frankfort society nor his remorse for his conduct to Friederike. It was his concern with his own life and what he was to

<sup>1</sup> November 28, 1771.

make of it. It is this concern that gives interest to his letters of the period which otherwise possess little intrinsic value, either in substance or in form. What we find in them, and what is hardly to be found elsewhere, is a mirror of one of the world's greatest spirits in the process of attaining self-knowledge and self-mastery in the direction of powers which are not yet fully revealed to him. At times, it appears to him as if the task of establishing any harmony between his own nature and the nature of things were hopeless. Now he is filled with an exhilarating confidence in his own gifts and in his destiny to bring them to full fruition; now he seems to be paralysed with a sense of impotence in which we see all the perils attending his peculiar temperament. In his letters to his Strassburg friend Salzmann we have the frankest communications regarding his alternating moods of depression and hopefulness. "What I am doing," he writes immediately after his settlement in Frankfort, "is of no account. So much the worse. As usual, more planned than done, and for that very reason nothing much will come of me."<sup>1</sup> To a different purport are his words in a later note (November 28) to the same correspondent: "In searching for your letter of October 5, I came upon a multitude of others requiring answers. Dear man, my friends must pardon me, my *nisus* forwards is so strong that I can seldom force myself to take breath, and cast a look backwards." In the opening of the year, 1772 (February 3), he is in the same sanguine temper: "Prospects daily widen out before me, and obstacles give way, so that I may confidently lay the blame on my own feet if I do not move on."

The "*nisus* forwards," of which he speaks, had no connection with the worldly ambition for success in his profession. What was consuming him was the double desire of mastering himself and at the same time of giving expression to the seething ideas

<sup>1</sup> Autumn, 1771. The letter is not dated.



and emotions which rendered that self-mastery so hard of attainment. From the moment of his return to Frankfort we see all the seeds fructifying which had taken root in him during his residence in Strassburg. He sends to Herder the ballads he had collected in Alsace, and sends him, also, translations from what he considered the original of the adored Ossian. But the overmastering influence in him at this time was the genius of Shakespeare, as it had been interpreted for him by Herder. Goethe's unbounded admiration for Shakespeare had already found expression in the rhapsody composed in Strassburg, to which reference has been made, and he communicated his enthusiasm to the circle of men and women who had gathered round his sister. Their enthusiasm took a form perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the time. Shakespeare's birthday occurred on October 14,<sup>1</sup> and it was resolved that, at once as a tribute to their divinity and as a challenge to all his gainsayers, the auspicious day should be celebrated with due rites. At Cornelia's instance, Herder, as high-priest of the object of their worship, was invited to honour the occasion. If he could not be present in body, he was at least to be present in spirit, and he was to send his essay on Shakespeare that it might form part of the day's liturgy. So under the roof of the precise Imperial Rath, to whom Klopstock's use of unrhymed verse in his *Messias* was an unpardonable innovation in German literature, the memory of the "drunken barbarian," as with Voltaire he must have regarded him, was celebrated—whether in his own presence or not, his son does not record.<sup>2</sup>

But Goethe was about to pay more serious homage to the Master, as he then understood him. On November 28, he informed Salzmann that he

<sup>1</sup> So it was then thought, but the exact date is uncertain.

<sup>2</sup> The toast of the evening—"The Will of all Wills"—was given by Goethe, who thereupon delivered the panegyric on Shakespeare which he had composed in Strassburg. This toast was followed by one to the health of Herder.

was engaged on a work which was absorbing him to the forgetfulness of Homer, Shakespeare, and everything else. He was dramatizing the history of "one of the noblest of Germans," rescuing from oblivion the memory of "an honest man." The "noblest of Germans" was Gottfried von Berlichingen (1482-1562), one of those "knights of the cows," whose predatory propensities were the terror of Germany throughout the Middle Ages, and who appears to have been neither better nor worse than the rest of his class. While still in Strassburg, Goethe had noted Gottfried as an appropriate subject for dramatic treatment, but, as he records in his Autobiography, it was immediately after his return to Frankfort that he first put his hand to the work. Stimulated to his task by his sister Cornelia, in the course of six weeks he had completed the play which, on its publication two years later, was to make him the most famous author in Germany.

Goethe's choice of *Götz* as a theme on which to try his powers is a revelation of the motives that were now compelling him. Of the nature of these motives he has himself given somewhat conflicting accounts. He tells his contemporary correspondents that the play was written to relieve his own bosom of its perilous stuff; to enable him "to forget the sun, moon, and dear stars," and, again, that its primary object was to do justice to the memory of a great man. Writing in old age, he mentions still another motive as mainly prompting him to the production of the play: it was written, he says, with the express object of improving the German stage, of rescuing it from the pitiful condition into which it had fallen during the first half of the eighteenth century. What is entirely obvious, however, is that Shakespeare is the beginning and end of the inspiration of the *Geschichte Gottfriedens von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand*, as the play in its original form was entitled. In its conception and in its details Shakespeare is everywhere suggested, though

it may be noted that the comic element with which Shakespeare flavours his tragedies is absent from *Götz*. Without Shakespeare the play could not have taken the shape in which we have it. Given the model, however, Goethe had to infuse it with motives which would have a living interest for his own time. One of these motives was the admiration of great men which Goethe shared with the generation to which he belonged. During this Frankfort period he was successively attracted by such contrasted types of heroes as Julius Cæsar, Socrates, and Mahomet as appropriate central figures for dramatic representation. "It is a pleasure to behold a great man," one of the characters in *Götz* is made to say; and, if Goethe had any determinate aim when he took his theme in hand, it was to present the spectacle of a hero for admiration and inspiration. As it was, deeper instincts of his nature asserted themselves as he proceeded with his work, and *Götz* is overshadowed by other characters in the drama in whom the poet himself, by his own admission, came to find a more congenial interest.

The play exists in three forms—the first draft being recast for publication in 1773, which second version was adapted for the Weimar theatre in collaboration with Schiller in 1804. It is generally admitted that in its first form we have the fullest manifestation of its author's genius, and equally the fullest expression of the original inspiration that led to its production. Like Shakespeare he had a book for his text—the *Memoirs* of Gottfried, written by himself; and like Shakespeare he took large liberties with his original—no fewer than six characters in the play, two of whom are of the first importance, being of Goethe's own invention. The plot may be briefly told. Adelbert von Weislingen, a Knight of the Empire, had been the early friend of Gottfried, but under the influence of the Bishop of Bamberg and others he had taken a line which led him into direct conflict with Gottfried. While the latter, identifying



himself with the lesser German nobles, was for supporting the power of the Emperor, Weislingen had identified himself with the princes whose object was to cripple it. Gottfried seizes Weislingen while on his way to the Bishop of Bamberg, and bears him off to his castle at Jaxthausen. The contrasted characters of the two chief personages in the play are now brought before us—Gottfried the rough soldier, honest, resolute, and Weislingen, more of a courtier than a soldier, weak and unstable. Overborne by the stronger nature of Gottfried, Weislingen agrees to break his alliance with the Bishop, and, as a pledge for his future conduct, betroths himself to Gottfried's sister Marie, who, weakly devout, is a counterpart to Gottfried's wife Elizabeth, who is depicted as a Spartan mother.<sup>1</sup> To square accounts with the Bishop, Weislingen finds it necessary to proceed to Bamberg, and the second Act tells the tale of his second apostacy. At Bamberg he comes under the spell of an enchantress in the shape of a beautiful woman, Adelheid von Walldorf, a widow, whose physical charms are represented as irresistible. Weislingen becomes her creature, forswears his bond with Gottfried, and rejoins the ranks of his enemies—news which Gottfried is reluctantly brought to credit. In the third Act we find Gottfried in a coil of troubles. He has robbed a band of merchants on their way from the Frankfort Fair, and, at the prompting of Weislingen, the Emperor puts him under the ban of the Empire, and dispatches an armed force against him. Beaten in the field and besieged in his own castle, he is at length forced to surrender. In the fourth Act he is a prisoner in Heilbronn, but is rescued by Franz von Sickingen, a knight of the same stamp and with the same political sympathies as himself. Sickingen, who is on friendly terms with the Emperor, does him the still further service of securing his relief from the ban, whereupon Gottfried

<sup>1</sup> In the characters of Marie and Elizabeth we have traits of Friederike and of Goethe's mother.

settles down to a peaceful life in his own castle, and to relieve its monotony betakes himself to the uncongenial task of writing his own memoirs. In the fifth Act we sup with horrors. The peasants rise in rebellion and wreak frightful vengeance on their oppressors. In the hope of controlling them, Gottfried, at their own request, puts himself at their head, but finds himself powerless to check their excesses, and on their defeat he is again taken prisoner. But the main interest of the last Act is concentrated in Adelheid, who now reveals all the depth of her sensual nature and her unscrupulous ambition. Weislingen she has discovered to be a despicable creature, and she attaches herself to Sickingen, in whom she finds a man after her own heart, able to satisfy all the cravings of her nature. She poisons Weislingen, who dies as he has lived, the victim of weakness rather than of wickedness. Her crimes are known to the judges of the Vehmgericht, who in their mysterious tribunal adjudge her to death, which is effected in a curious scene by one of their agents. The drama closes with the death of Gottfried in prison, baffled in his dearest schemes, blasted in reputation, and with gloomy forebodings for the future of his country.

Such is an outline of the production in which Goethe made his first appeal to his countrymen at large,<sup>1</sup> and which is in such singular contrast to the ideals of his maturity. That it was not the inevitable birth of his whole heart and mind, is proved by the fact that he never repeated the experiment. Neither the incidents nor the hero of the piece, indeed, were of a nature to elicit the full play of his genius. Goethe had not, like Scott, an inborn interest in the scenes of the camp and the field, and could not, like Scott, take a special delight in describing them for their own sake. To the portrayal of a character like Gottfried Scott could give his whole heart, but

<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, the Leipzig book of verses did not attract general attention.

Goethe required characters of a subtler type to enlist his full sympathies and to give scope to his full powers. Goethe himself has told us how, as he proceeded in the writing of the play, his interest in his hero gradually flagged. In depicting the charms of Adelheid, he says, he fell in love with her himself, and his interest in her fate gradually overmastered him. In truth, it is in scenes where Gottfried is not the principal actor that any originality in the play is to be found, for in these scenes Goethe was drawing from his own experience and recording emotions that had distracted himself. In the unstable Weislingen he represents a weakness of his own nature of which he was himself well aware. "You are a chameleon," Adelheid tells Weislingen; and, as we have seen, Goethe so described himself. It is, therefore, in the relations of Weislingen to Marie and Adelheid that we must look for the spontaneous expression of the poet's genius, working on material drawn from self-introspection. In Weislingen's hasty wooing and equally hasty desertion of Marie we have an exaggerated presentment of Goethe's own conduct to Friederike, to which objection may be taken on the score of delicacy, though he himself suggests that it is to be regarded as a public confession of his self-reproach. In depicting Marie and Weislingen he had Friederike and himself before him to restrain his imagination within the limits of nature and truth. In the case of Adelheid he had no model before him, and the result is that, with youthful exaggeration, he has made her a beautiful monster with no redeeming touch, and, therefore, of little human interest. Such a character was essentially alien to Goethe's own nature, and so are the melodramatic scenes which depict her desperate attempts to escape from her toils and the proceedings of the avenging tribunal that had marked her for judgment.

As in the case of all Goethe's longer productions, critical opinion has been divided from the beginning regarding the intrinsic merits of *Götz*. In the opinion



of critics like Edmond Scherer it is a crude imitation of Shakespeare with little promise of its author's future achievement, while other critics, like Lewes, regard it as a "work of daring power, of vigour, of originality." On one point Goethe himself and all his critics are agreed: the play as a whole is only a succession of scenes, loosely strung together, with no inner development leading up to a determinate end. In his later life Goethe characterized Shakespeare's plays as "highly interesting tales, only told by more persons than one." Whatever truth there may be in this judgment in the case of Shakespeare, it exactly describes *Götz*. It is as a tale, a narrative, and not as a drama, that it is to be read if it is to be enjoyed without the sense of artistic failure. The anachronisms with which the piece abounds, and which Hegel caustically noted, have been a further stumbling-block to the critics.<sup>1</sup> In the second scene of the first Act, Luther is introduced for no other purpose than to expound ideas which come strangely from his mouth, but which were effervescing in the minds of Goethe and his contemporaries—the ideas which they had learned from Rousseau regarding the excellence of the natural man. Similarly, in the scene following, educational problems are discussed which sound oddly in the castle of a mediæval baron, but which were awakening interest in Goethe's own day. In the supreme moments of his career—on the occasion of the surrender of his castle and in his last hour—Gottfried is made to utter the word *freedom* as the watchword of his aspirations, but in so doing he is expressing Goethe's own passionate protest against the conventions of his age in religion, in philosophy, and in art, and not a sentiment in keeping with the class of which he is a type.

These blemishes in the play as a work of art are apparent, yet it may be said that it was mainly owing

<sup>1</sup> Lessing strongly disapproved of *Götz*, as flouting the doctrines laid down in his *Dramaturgie*. When his brother announced to him that *Götz* had been played with great applause in Berlin, his cold comment was that no doubt the chief credit was due to the decorator.

to these very blemishes that the "beautiful monster," as Wieland called it, took contemporaries by storm and retains its freshness of interest after the lapse of a century and a half. The successive scenes are, indeed, without organic connection, but each scene by itself has the vivacity and directness of improvisation. Nor do the anachronisms to which criticism may object really mar the interest of the work. Rather they constitute its most characteristic elements, proceeding as they do from the poet's own deepest intellectual interests, and, therefore, from his most spontaneous inspiration.

But the most conclusive testimony to the essential power of the play is the effect it produced not only in German but in European literature. Its publication in its altered form in 1773 had the effect of a bomb on the literary public of Germany. It sent a shudder of horror through the sticklers for the rules of the classical drama which it ignored with such contemptuous indifference; a shudder of delight through the band of effervescing youths who shared Goethe's revolutionary ideals, and to whom *Götz* was a manifesto and a challenge to all traditional conventions in literature and life. It was the immediate parent of that truly German growth—the literature of *Sturm und Drang*, whose exponents, says Kant, thought that they could not more effectively show that they were budding geniuses than by flinging all rules to the winds, and that one appears to better advantage on a spavined hack than on a trained steed. The literature of *Sturm und Drang* was a passing phenomenon, but the influence of *Götz* did not end with its abortive life. But for *Götz* Schiller's early productions would have been differently inspired; and to *Götz* also was due much of the inspiration of the subsequent German Romantic School, though many of its developments were abhorrent to Goethe's nature both in youth and in maturity. It emancipated the drama from conventional shackles, but it did more: it extended the range of national thought,

sentiment, and emotion, and for good and evil introduced new elements into German literature which have maintained their place there since its first portentous appearance. And German critics are unanimous in assigning another result to the publication of *Götz*: in its style as in its form it set convention at naught, and thus marks an epoch in the development of German literary language. Not since Luther, "whose words were battles," had German been written so direct from the heart and with such elemental force as makes words living things.

It has been a commonplace remark that 1773, the year of the publication of *Götz*, corresponds in European literature to 1789 in European political history. The remark may be exaggerated, but, if a work is to be named which marks the advent of what is covered by the vague name of romanticism, *Götz* may fairly claim the honour. It had precursors of more or less importance in other countries, but, by the nature of its subject, by its audacious disregard of reigning models, and by its resounding notoriety, it gave the signal for a fresh reconstruction of art and life. It gave the decisive impulse to the writer who is the European representative of the romantic movement, and whose genius specifically fitted him to work the vein which was opened in *Götz*—a task to which Goethe himself was not called. In 1799 Scott published his translation of *Götz*,<sup>1</sup> and followed it up by his series of romantic poems in which the influence of Goethe's work was the main inspiration. But it was in his prose romances, dealing with the Middle Ages, that he found the appropriate form for his inspiration—a form which ensured a popular appeal, impossible in the case of the severer form of the drama. In the enchanter's sway which Scott exercised over Europe during the greater part of the nineteenth century, the memories of *Götz* were not the least potent of his spells.

<sup>1</sup> Two of the scenes in *Götz* were imitated by Scott in his own work—in the Vehmgericht scene in *Anne of Geierstein* and in the description of the siege of Torquilstone, given by Rebecca to the wounded Ivanhoe. Scott also borrowed from *Egmont*.



## CHAPTER VI

### INFLUENCE OF MERCK AND THE DARMSTADT CIRCLE

1772

SPECIALLY associated with *Götz von Berlichingen*, but associated also with Goethe's general development at this time, was another of those mentors whose counsel and stimulus were necessary to him at all periods of his life. This was Johann Heinrich Merck, the son of an apothecary in Darmstadt and now Paymaster of the Forces there. Of Merck Goethe says that "he had the greatest influence on my life," and he makes him the subject of one of his elaborate character-sketches in his Autobiography. To men of original nature, however discordant with his own, Goethe was always attracted. We have seen him in more or less close relations with Behrisch, Jung Stilling, and Herder, from all of whom he was divided by dissonances which made a perfect mutual understanding impossible. So it was in the case of Merck, as Goethe's references to him in his Autobiography and elsewhere clearly imply. In Merck there was apparently a mixture of conflicting elements which made him a mystery to his friends, and his suicide at the age of fifty points to something morbid in his nature. Of his real goodness of heart and of his genuine admiration for what he considered worthy of it, his own reported sayings and the testimony of others leave us in no doubt. Recording his impression of Goethe after a few interviews, he wrote: "I begin to have a real affection for Goethe. He is a man after my own heart, as I have found

few." On the other hand, there were traits in him which Goethe did not scruple to call Mephistophelian—an opinion shared even by Goethe's mother, whose nature it was to see the best side of men and things. His variable humour and caustic tongue made him at once a terror and an attraction in whatever society he moved, and it is evident from the tone of Goethe's reminiscences of him that his intercourse with Merck was a mixed pleasure. But, as we have seen, it was an abiding principle of Goethe to be repelled by no one who had something to give him, and Merck possessed qualities and accomplishments which were of the first importance to him in the phase through which he was now passing. Merck was keenly interested in literature, especially in English literature, and had all Goethe's enthusiasm for Shakespeare. Though his own original productions were of mediocre quality, he had an insight into the character and genius of others which Goethe fully recognized and to which he acknowledges his special obligation. His general attitude in criticism was "negative and destructive," but this attitude was entirely wholesome for Goethe at a period when instinct and passion tended to overbear his judgment. With admirable penetration he saw how Goethe during these Frankfort years occasionally wasted his powers in attempts which were unworthy of his gifts and alien to his real nature. It was in reference to these futile tendencies that Merck gave him counsel in words which subsequent critics have recognized as the most adequate definition of the essential characteristic of Goethe's genius as a poet. "Your endeavour, your unswerving aim," he wrote, "is to give poetic form to the real. Others seek to realize the so-called poetic, the imaginative; and the result is nothing but stupid nonsense." Like subsequent critics, also, Merck saw the superiority of the first draft of *Götz* to the second, but when the latter was completed, he played a friend's part. "It is rubbish and of no account," was his characteristic remark; "however, let

the thing be printed";<sup>1</sup> and published it was, Merck bearing the cost of printing and Goethe supplying the paper.

It was towards the close of 1771 that Goethe had made Merck's acquaintance<sup>2</sup> on the occasion of a visit Merck had paid to Frankfort; and in March of the following year, in company with the younger Schlosser, they renewed their intercourse in Darmstadt, where Merck was settled. The visit lasted a few days, and was of some importance, as it introduced Goethe to a society of which he was to see much during the remainder of his stay in Frankfort, and which, according to his own testimony, "invigorated and widened his powers." It was a society of which we are surprised to find the Mephistophelian Merck the leading and most admired member. It consisted of a group of men and women associated with the Court at Darmstadt, whose bond of union was the cult of sensibility as the rising generation of Germany had learned it from Rousseau, Richardson, and Sterne. They went by the name of the *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, and the fervours of the community were at least those of genuine votaries. So far as Goethe is concerned, it was in three of the priestesses, one of them Caroline Flachsland, the betrothed of Herder, that he found the attraction of the society. For the youth who two years later was to give classic expression to the cult of sensibility in his *Werther*, his intercourse with these ladies of Darmstadt was an appropriate schooling. For their sensibilities were boundless, and they did not shrink from giving them expression. Caroline relates to her future husband how one night in the woods she fell on her knees at sight of the moon and arranged some glow-worms in her hair so that their loves might not be disturbed. On one occasion when Merck and Goethe met two of the coterie, one of them embraced Merck with

<sup>1</sup> Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, November 9, 1824.

<sup>2</sup> It was Schlosser who had made Goethe and Merck acquainted. Herder, to whom Merck was known, had been a previous intermediary.



kisses, and the other fell upon his breast. Goethe was not a youth to be indifferent to such favours, and the attentions of Caroline were such as to disquiet Herder and to occasion an estrangement between the two friends which lasted for nearly two years.

From the effusive Caroline herself we learn the impression Goethe made on the precious circle. "A few days ago [in the beginning of March, 1772]," she writes to Herder, "I made the acquaintance of your friend Goethe and Herr Schlosser. . . . Goethe is such a good-hearted, lively creature, without any parade of learning, and has made such a to-do with Merck's children that my heart has quite gone out to him. . . . The second afternoon we spent in a pleasant stroll and over a bowl of punch in our house. We were not sentimental, but very merry, and Goethe and I danced a minuet to the piano. Thereafter he recited an excellent ballad of yours [the Scottish ballad *Edward*, translated by Herder]." On the occasion of a later visit (April) of Goethe to Darmstadt, she again writes to Herder: "Our Goethe has come on foot from Frankfort<sup>1</sup> on a visit to Merck. We have been together every day, and once, when we had gone together into the wood, we were soaked to the skin. We took refuge under a tree, and Goethe sang a little song, 'Under the greenwood tree,' which you translated from Shakespeare. Our common plight made us very confidential. He read aloud to us some of the best scenes from his *Gottfried von Berlichingen*. . . . Goethe is choke-full of songs. One about a hut built out of the ruins of a temple is excellent.<sup>2</sup> . . . The poor fellow told my sister and myself a day ago that he had already been once in love, but that the girl had played with him for a whole year and then deserted him.<sup>3</sup> He believed, however, that she really loved him, but another had appeared on the scene, and he was made a goose of."

<sup>1</sup> A six hours' walk.

<sup>2</sup> The poem entitled *Der Wanderer*, noted below.

<sup>3</sup> The girl meant was no doubt Käthchen Schönkopf.

Under the inspiration of these caressing attentions Goethe's muse could not be silent, and in the course of the spring and autumn he threw off a succession of pieces which are the classical expression of the sentimentalism of the period. To the three ladies-in-chief, under the pseudonyms of Urania, Lila, and Psyche (Caroline Flachsland), he successively addressed odes in which he gave them back their own emotions with interest. Their inspiration is sufficiently suggested by these lines which conclude the verses entitled *Elysium, an Uranien* :—

Seligkeit ! Seligkeit !  
Eines Kusses Gefühl.

In all the three poems we have another illustration of Goethe's susceptibility to immediate influences. Under the inspiration of Friederike's simplicity he had written lyrics which were as pure in form as direct in feeling. Now we have him indulging in a vein of artificial sentiment, which, it might have been supposed, he had for ever left behind as the result of his schooling in Strassburg.

In two pieces belonging to the same period, however, is revealed in fullest measure the true self of the poet, with all the emotional and intellectual preoccupations which he had brought with him from Strassburg. Of the one, *Wanderers Sturmlied*, he has given in his Autobiography an account which is fully borne out by the character of the poem itself. It was composed, he tells us, in a terrific storm on one of his restless journeys between Frankfort and Darmstadt, and at a time when the memory of Friederike was still haunting him. Of Friederike, however, there is no direct suggestion in the poem ; from first to last it is a pæan of the *Sturm und Drang*, composed in a form directly imitated from Pindar, whom he had been ardently studying since his return to Frankfort. The theme is the glorification of genius—genius in its upwelling and original force as manifest in Pindar, not as in poets like Anacreon

and Theocritus. He who is in possession of this genius is armed against all the powers of nature and fate, and his end can only be crowned with victory. Goethe himself calls the poem a *Halbunsinn*, and one of his most sympathetic critics—Viktor Hehn—admits that to follow its drift requires some labour and some creative phantasy on the part of the reader.<sup>1</sup> But it is not its poetical merit that gives the poem its chief interest; it is to be taken, as it was meant, as a profession of the poet's literary faith at the period when it was written, and as such it is a historic document of the *Sturm und Drang*—at once an illustration and an exposition of its motives and ideals. "All this," is Goethe's mature comment on that and other productions of the same period, "was deeply and genuinely felt, but often expressed in a one-sided and unbalanced way."

Of far higher poetic value is the second poem, *Der Wanderer*,<sup>2</sup> in which Matthew Arnold found "the power of Greek radiance" which Goethe could give to his handling of nature. The scene of the poem is in southern Italy, near Cumæ. The Wanderer, wearied by his travel under the noonday sun, comes upon a woman by the wayside whom he asks where he may quench his thirst. She conducts him through the neighbouring thicket, when an architrave, half-buried in the moss, and bearing an effaced inscription, catches his eye. They reach the woman's hut, which he finds to have been constructed from the stones of a ruined temple. Asleep in the hut is the woman's infant son, whom she leaves in the arms of the Wanderer, while she goes to fetch water from the spring. She presses on him a piece of bread, the only food she has to offer, and invites him to remain till the return of her husband to the evening meal. He refuses her

<sup>1</sup> *Ueber Goethe's Gedichte* (1911), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> On account of his constant travels between Frankfort and Darmstadt, Goethe was known among his friends as the *Wanderer*. The poem was written in the autumn, during his residence in Wetzlar.



hospitality, and resumes his journey to Cumæ, his destination. Such is the outline of the poem, which is in the form of a dialogue, in the irregular measure common to the odes above mentioned. But in the *Wanderer* there is nothing dithyrambic; rather, its characteristic is a reflective repose, which is in strange contrast to the tumultuous outpouring of the *Wanderers Sturmlied*, and which might induce us to assign its production to a later day in Goethe's life, to the period of his sojourn in Italy, when years had somewhat chastened him, and when he was under the spell of the artistic remains of classical antiquity. Of the finest inspiration is the contrast between the remarks of the peasant woman wholly engrossed in the immediate needs of the day, and the speculations of the Wanderer as he comes upon the ruins that time has wrought upon the choicest works of man's hand. Here we are far from all vapid and artificial sentiment; we have philosophical meditation proceeding from the profoundest source of the pathos of human life, the transitoriness of man and his works. Completely in accord with the philosophy of his ripest years, however, the poet finds no ground for melancholy regrets in the spectacle of nature triumphing over man's handiwork. Even in her work of corrosion she provides for the welfare of her children; in a home reared out of a ruined temple happy human lives are spent. And it is in the spirit of the broadest humanity—a spirit that marks him off from the sentimentalists of the Darmstadt circle—that he regards the “ruins of time.”

Natur! du ewig keimende,  
Schaffst jeden zum Genuss des Lebens,  
Hast deine Kinder alle mütterlich  
Mit Erbteil ausgestattet, einer Hütte.

Nature! eternal engenderer,  
Thou bring'st forth thy children for the joy of living,  
With care maternal thou providest  
Each with his portion, a cottage.

In reading this poem we feel the force of the words in which the younger Schlosser records his impression of Goethe at the moment when both first made the acquaintance of the Darmstadt society. "I shall be accompanied [to Darmstadt]," he wrote, "by a young friend of the highest promise who, through his strenuous endeavours to purify his soul, without unnerving it, is to me worthy of special honour."<sup>1</sup> The purification had indeed begun, but Goethe had to pass through many fires before the purification was complete. One such fire was immediately awaiting him.

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 19-20.

## CHAPTER VII

WETZLAR AND CHARLOTTE BUFF

MAY—SEPTEMBER, 1772

DURING the summer and autumn of 1772 Goethe found himself in a society and surroundings which were in curious contrast to those of Darmstadt; and the next four months were to supply him with an experience which, wrought into one book of transcendent literary effect, was to make his name known, literally, to the ends of the earth,<sup>1</sup> and which may be regarded as the most remarkable episode in his long life. It was as "the author of *Werther*" that he was known to the reading world, until after his death the publication of the completed *Faust* gradually effaced the conception of Goethe as the master-sentimentalist of European literature.

It was mainly as a temporary escape from the tedium of Frankfort that, towards the end of May, 1772, Goethe proceeded to Wetzlar, a little town on the Lahn, a confluent of the Rhine. His settlement in Wetzlar had the semblance of a serious professional purpose, since Wetzlar was the historic legal capital of the Holy Roman Empire, and the seat of the Imperial Court of Justice. If he had any such serious purpose, his experience of the place speedily dispelled it. The place itself he found distasteful; a "little, ill-built town," he calls it, though the modern visitor finds it not unattractive,

<sup>1</sup> *Werther*, as Goethe reminds us in one of his Venetian epigrams, was known in China:—

"Doch was fördert es mich, dass auch sogar der Chinese  
Malet mit ängstlicher Hand Werthern und Lotten auf Glas?"



with its climbing, tortuous streets, reminiscent of the Middle Age, and with its impressive cathedral, one of the most interesting specimens of mediæval architecture to be found in Germany, and still unfinished in Goethe's day. Instead of the spectacle of an august tribunal administering prompt and even justice, what he saw was a multitude of corrupt officials, deluded litigants, and endless delays of law. Wetzlar, in fact, he gives us to understand, destroyed any respect he may ever have had alike for judges and for the law they professed to administer. He duly enrolled himself as a "Praktikant,"<sup>1</sup> but, as was the case with the majority of that class who haunted the town, his legal activity was confined to this step. "Solitary, depressed, aimless," so he described himself to his friends during his first weeks in Wetzlar.<sup>2</sup> Disgusted with law, he found refuge in the study of literature. In a long and rhapsodical letter to Herder he depicts the intellectual and spiritual experiences through which he was now passing. The Greeks were his one preoccupation. Homer, Xenophon, Plato, Theocritus, and Anacreon he had read in turn, but it was in Pindar he was now revelling, and from Pindar he was learning the lesson that only in laying firm hold of one's subject is the essence of all mastery. A sentence of Herder to the effect that "thought and feeling create the expression" had rejoiced his heart as voicing his own deepest experience. Herder had said of *Götz* that its author had been spoilt by Shakespeare, and he modestly accepted the censure. *Götz*, he admits, had been *thought*, not *felt*, and he would be depressed by his failure, were he not occasionally conscious that some day he would do better things.<sup>3</sup>

As in Strassburg, it was at a *table d'hôte*<sup>4</sup> that Goethe made the acquaintance of the youths who,

<sup>1</sup> The *Praktikanten* were voluntary attendants on the Imperial Court, had little or no dependence on the authorities, and lived on their own resources.

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Flachsland to Herder, May 25, 1772.

<sup>3</sup> Undated letter to Herder (mid-July, 1772).

<sup>4</sup> In the *Kronprinz*, the principal hotel in the town.

like himself, were idling away their time in Wetzlar. To relieve the tedium of the place <sup>1</sup> they had formed a fantastic society on a feudal model, with a Grand-master, Chancellor, and all the other subordinate officials—the point of the jest being that each associate bore the name and played the part of his office and title. For frolic of all kinds Goethe was ever ready; his taste for practical joking, indeed, as we shall see, occasionally led him to play questionable pranks. Under the name of Götz von Berlichingen he became a member of the brotherhood, and, according to his own account, he contributed to the gaiety of the proceedings. Among the company, however, there were a few serious persons with tastes kindred to his own, and he specially names F. W. Gotter, Secretary of the Gotha Legation at Wetzlar, as one who, like Salzmann and Schlosser, impressed him by his character and talent. In English literature they had a common interest, and, as a poem which both admired, they each made a translation of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*—Gotter, according to Goethe, being the more successful in the attempt. Gotter was thus still another of those grave counsellors whom Goethe had the good fortune to discover and attach to himself amid the distracting frivolities of every society he frequented.<sup>2</sup>

“What happened to me in Wetzlar,” Goethe writes in his Autobiography, “is of no great significance.” But posterity has thought differently, and, if we are to judge by the consequences of what happened to him in Wetzlar, both for himself and for the world, posterity is right.<sup>3</sup> Be it said also, that contemporary testimony at first hand leaves us

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's own lodging (still shown) was in the *Gewandsgasse*, a narrow, dirty street, whence sun or moon could be seen at no season of the year.

<sup>2</sup> In his contemporary letters, Goethe does not always speak of Gotter so favourably as he does in his Autobiography.

<sup>3</sup> An exhaustive account of Goethe's sojourn in Wetzlar will be found in W. Herbst's *Goethe in Wetzlar, 1772. Vier Monate aus des Dichters Jugendleben*, Gotha, 1881.

in no doubt that, but for his Wetzlar experience, one of the most remarkable phases in Goethe's development would not have found expression, and one resounding note in European literature would have been unheard.

In Leipzig and Strassburg Goethe had found objects to engage his affections, and he was not to be without a similar experience in Wetzlar. During his first weeks there he had seen no maiden to interest him, and the fact may explain his dissatisfaction during that period. After leaving in succession the circles of Sesenheim, Frankfort, and Darmstadt, he tells us, he felt a void in his heart which he could not fill. An accident at length came to fill the void. On June 9 (the date is carefully recorded) he met a girl at a ball in a neighbouring village (Garbenheim), who "made a complete conquest of him."<sup>1</sup> Her name was Charlotte Buff, the second daughter of an official of the Teutonic Order—a widower with twelve children. Charlotte, or Lotte, as he calls her, was of a different type from any of his previous loves, so that she possessed all the freshness of novelty. Though only nineteen, she had taken upon her the care of the numerous household, and discharged her duties with a motherly tact and good sense which excited general admiration. Over Lotte's personal appearance Goethe is not rapturous as he was over Friederike; he simply says that she had a light and graceful figure, and in the same cool tone remarks that she was one of those women who do not inspire ardent passion, but who give general pleasure. So he chose to say in the retrospect, but neither his contemporary words nor actions permit us to believe that his feeling to Lotte was merely a calm regard. In the case of Lotte his situation was materially different from what it had been in the case of Friederike. He had no rival in his relations to Friederike; in his relations to Lotte he had one. Shortly after their first meeting he learned that

<sup>1</sup> This is the expression of Kestner, Lotte's betrothed.



Lotte was already betrothed, though the fact was not known to the world. The successful wooer was Johann Christian Kestner, a native of Hanover, and a Secretary of Legation settled in Wetzlar. Kestner was at every point the antithesis of his intruding rival. He was calm, deliberate, unimaginative, yet conspicuously a man of insight and character, with a fund of good sense and good temper, on which the situation made a large draft. "Kestner must be a very good man," was the frequent remark of Merck's wife in view of the relations of the three parties to each other, and Kestner's own words prove it. It is in his Letters and Diary that we have the closest glimpse of all three, and all that he says of himself, of Lotte, and of Goethe, shows a tact and good feeling that inspire esteem.

After their first meeting at the ball, according to Goethe's own testimony, he became Lotte's constant attendant. "Soon he could not endure her absence." In her home he made himself the idol of the children; in the beautiful surrounding country they were inseparable companions—Kestner, when his avocations permitted, occasionally joining them. "So through the splendid summer," he records, "they lived a true German idyll." But the testimony of Kestner shows that the idyll was not without its discords. Goethe, he says, "with all his philosophy and his natural pride, had not such self-control as wholly to restrain his inclination. . . . His peace of mind suffered," and "there were various notable scenes," though Lotte showed herself a model of discretion. The situation was, in fact, an impossible one, and Goethe came to see it. Several times he made the effort to break his bonds and flee, but it was not till the beginning of September that he took the decisive step. Equally from his own and from Kestner's account of the circumstances of his flight we receive the impression that his relation to Lotte was such as to make their further intercourse undesirable. The night before he went, according to Kestner, all three

were together in Lotte's home, and their conversation, suggested by Lotte, turned upon the dead and the possibility of holding intercourse with them. Whichever of the three should die first, it was agreed, should, if possible, communicate with the survivors. All through the evening Goethe was in deep dejection, knowing, as he did, that it would be the last they would spend together. The following morning he left Wetzlar without intimating his intention to any of his friends—a proceeding which his grand-aunt, resident in the town, characterized as “very ill-bred,” declaring that she would let the Frau Goethe know how her son had behaved.<sup>1</sup> In three brief parting notes which he addressed to Kestner and Lotte, we have the expression of the mental tumult which his passion for Lotte had produced in him. On his return home, after the last evening he spent with them, he wrote as follows to Kestner: “He is gone, Kestner; by the time you receive this note, he is gone. Give Lotte the enclosed note. I was quite calm, but your conversation has torn me to distraction. At this moment I can say nothing more than farewell. Had I remained a moment longer with you, I could not have restrained myself. Now I am alone, and to-morrow I go. Oh, my poor head!” In the lines enclosed for Lotte he has this outburst with reference to the evening's conversation: “When I ventured to say all I felt, it was of the present world I was thinking, of your hand which I kissed for the last time.”

From this record of the Wetzlar episode, directly reproducing the relations of all the persons concerned, it is clear that Lotte was for Goethe more than the pleasant companion he represents her in his Autobiography. If his own words and those of Kestner have any meaning, his feeling towards her amounted to a passion which only the singular self-control of

<sup>1</sup> Such abrupt departures were characteristic of Goethe. We shall find him taking similar unceremonious leave of another of his loves. Goethe, wrote Frau von Stein to her son (May, 1812), “kann das Abschiednehmen nicht leiden, er ging ohne Abschied neulich von mir.”

her and Kestner prevented from breaking bounds. Strange as it may appear, neither Lotte nor Kestner regarded one whose presence was a menace to their own peace with other feelings than esteem, and apparently even affection. He parted from Lotte, he says, "with a clearer conscience" than from Friederike, and the statement is at least borne out by what we know of the sequel to the "splendid idyll." As we shall see, he continued to remain on the most cordial terms with the two lovers, and, though with mingled feelings, he gave them his best blessing on the day which saw them united as husband and wife.

In what has been said of Goethe's relations to Lotte Buff it is the emotional side of his nature that has been before us, but from the hand of the judicious Kestner we have a portrait of the whole man which leaves nothing to be desired in its completeness and insight. Kestner's description of his first meeting with his formidable rival reminds us of the "conquering lord" whose self-assurance evoked Herder's stinging criticism. Stretched on his back on the grass under a tree, Goethe was carrying on a conversation with two acquaintances who stood by. Kestner's first decided impression was that the stranger was "no ordinary man," and that he had "genius and a lively imagination." His final and complete impression, after Goethe had left Wetzlar, he thus records:—

"He has very many gifts, is a real genius, and a man of character; he has an extraordinarily lively imagination, and so, for the most part, expresses himself in pictures and similes. He is himself in the habit of saying that he always expresses himself in general terms, can never express himself with precision; when he is older, however, he hopes to think and express the thought as it is. He is violent in all his emotions; yet often exercises great self-command. His manner of thinking is noble; as free as possible from all prejudices, he acts on the prompting of the moment without troubling whether it may please other people, is in the fashion, or whether convention



permits it. All constraint is hateful to him. He is fond of children and can occupy himself much with them. He is *bizarre*; in his conduct and manner there are various peculiarities which might make him disagreeable. But with children, with women, and many others he is nevertheless a favourite. For the female sex he has great respect. *In principis* he is not yet fixed, and is still only endeavouring after a sure system. To say something on this point; he thinks highly of Rousseau, but is not a blind worshipper of him. He is not what we call orthodox; yet this is not from pride or caprice or from a desire to play a part. On certain important matters, also, he expresses himself only to few, and does not willingly disturb others in their ideas. He certainly hates scepticism, and strives after truth and settled conviction on certain subjects of the first importance; believes even that he has already attained conviction on the most important; but, so far as I have observed, this is not the case. He does not go to church; not even to communion, and he prays seldom. For, says he, I am not hypocrite enough for that. At times he seems at rest with regard to certain subjects; at other times, however, very far from being so. He reverences the Christian religion, but not as our theologians present it. He believes in a future life and a better state of existence. He strives after truth, and yet attaches more importance to feeling than to demonstration as the test of it. He has already accomplished much; has many acquirements and much reading, but has thought and reasoned still more. He has mainly devoted himself to *belles lettres* and the fine arts, or rather to all branches of knowledge, only not to the so-called bread-winning ones. I wished to describe him, but to do so I should run to too great length, for he is one of whom there is a great deal to be said. *In one word, he is a very remarkable man.*"<sup>1</sup>

Kestner's characterization of Goethe will be found in Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. pp. 21-3.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AFTER WETZLAR

1772-1773

IN *Götz von Berlichingen* Goethe had given expression to the ideals and emotions he had brought with him from Strassburg; Shakespeare and the memory of Friederike had been the main impulses to its production. As the result of his experience at Wetzlar, he was filled with a new inspiration, which, though it did not immediately find utterance, left him no repose till it was embodied in a work in which the man and the artist in him equally found deliverance. That the conception came to him shortly after his leaving Wetzlar we have conclusive evidence. In the beginning of November, 1772, after his return to Frankfort from Wetzlar, he received the news that a youth named Jerusalem, a casual acquaintance of his own,<sup>1</sup> had committed suicide as the result of an unhappy love adventure. Instantly, Goethe tells us in his *Autobiography*, the plan of *Werther* shaped itself in his mind; and his contemporary letters bear out the statement. Immediately on receiving the news of Jerusalem's death, he wrote to Kestner for a detailed account of all the circumstances, and he made a careful copy of the information with which Kestner supplied him. In point of fact, it was not till after more than a year that *Werther* came to

<sup>1</sup> Goethe had made Jerusalem's acquaintance in Leipzig. Jerusalem called Goethe a *Geck*, a coxcomb, a description which, as we have seen, was not inapplicable to him in his Leipzig days. Jerusalem was a friend of Lessing, who highly esteemed him, and after his death published his MSS.

fruition, but that he was in labour with the portentous birth all its lineaments were to show.

But before *Werther* came to birth, Goethe went through another experience which was to form an essential part of its tissue. Merck, to whom Goethe attributes the chief influence over him during this Frankfort period, was again the intermediary. Before Goethe left Wetzlar, Merck had arranged that they should meet at Ehrenbreitstein, where he would introduce Goethe to a family resident there.<sup>1</sup> The family was that of Herr von la Roche, a Privy Councillor in the service of the Elector of Trier, and it consisted of himself, his wife and two daughters. The head of the house, a matter-of-fact man of the world, plays no part in Goethe's relations to the family. It was Frau von la Roche to whom, as a desirable acquaintance, Merck specially wished to introduce his friend, and the sequel proved that he had rightly divined their mutual affinities. The cousin of Wieland, with whom she had had a *liaison* before her marriage, she was now past forty, but, according to Goethe's description of her, she possessed all the charm of youth with the dignity and repose of maturity. What is evident is, that Goethe saw in her the type of a high-bred woman such as had not yet crossed his path. In his reminiscence of her, his words have a warmth which is in notable contrast to the coldness of his portrait of Lotte Buff. "She was a most wonderful woman," he writes; "I knew no other to compare with her. Slight and delicately formed, rather tall than short, she had contrived even in advanced years to retain a certain elegance both of form and of bearing which pleasingly combined the manner of a Court lady with that of a dignified burgess's wife."<sup>2</sup> In addition to these graces, Frau von la Roche had precisely the temperament and the

<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, Goethe announced himself. Merck arrived after him.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Schiller (July 24, 1799) Goethe gives a much less favourable estimate of Frau von la Roche, whom he had just met: "Sie gehört zu den nivellierenden Naturen, sie hebt das Gemeine herauf und zieht das Vorzügliche herunter. . . ."



mental qualities that appealed to Goethe in the emotional phase through which he was now passing. She lived in the same world of sentiment as the ladies of the Darmstadt circle, and she had the gift of effusive utterance, as she had shown in a novel in the manner of Richardson which had brought her some celebrity.

With Frau von la Roche Goethe established a Platonic relation which he assiduously cultivated during the remainder of his residence in Frankfort, but there was another member of the household to whom he was attracted by a livelier feeling. This was the elder of the two daughters, Maximiliane by name, a girl of seventeen, whose charms were subsequently to be given to the lady of Werther's infatuation. From what we have seen of Goethe's inflammability, we are prepared for the naïve remark in which he records his new sensation. "It is a very pleasant sensation," he says, "when a new passion begins to stir in us before the old one is quite extinct. So, as the sun sets, we gladly behold the moon rise on the opposite horizon, and rejoice in the double splendour of the two heavenly lights." Be it said that the atmosphere of the household was provocative of relaxed feelings. Goethe was not the only guest. Besides Merck, there was a youth named Leuchsenring whose special line of activity had endeared him to a wide circle. Leuchsenring made it his business to enter into correspondence with susceptible souls, whose effusions he carried about with him in dispatch-boxes and was in the habit of reading aloud to sympathetic listeners. The reading of these precious documents was part of the entertainment of the circle in which Goethe now found himself, and he assures us that he enjoyed it. We see, therefore, the world in which he was now moving—a world in which those who belonged to it made it their first concern to titillate their sensibilities, and squandered their emotions with a profusion and abandonment in which self-respecting reserve was forgotten. It was a world

wide as the poles apart from that of Sesenheim, where human relations were founded on natural feeling and only the language of the heart was spoken. Once again Goethe had taken on the hue of his surroundings. In Leipzig he had been what we have seen him; now under the influence of Darmstadt he appears in still another phase—to be by no means the last.

From Goethe's connection with the family of von la Roche was to come the occasion which immediately prompted the production of *Werther*, but more than a year was to elapse before the occasion came, and in the interval his own mental experiences were to supply him with further materials which were to find expression in that work. In his correspondence of the period we have the fullest revelation of these experiences, and they leave us with the impression that he spoke only the literal truth when he tells us in his Autobiography that, on being delivered of *Werther*, he felt as if he had made a general confession. The same period, moreover, is signalized by a succession of minor productions which, though they did not attain to the celebrity of *Götz* and *Werther*, exhibit a range of intellectual interests and a play of varied moods which materially enhance our conceptions of his genius.

The circumstances in which Goethe had left Friederike had precluded subsequent communications with her and her family; in the case of the Wetzlar circle there was no such impediment to future epistolary intercourse. He had left Lotte Buff, as he tells us, with a clearer conscience than he had left Friederike, and on the part of Lotte and Kestner there was apparently no feeling that prompted a breach of their relations with him. For more than a year he kept up assiduous communications with Wetzlar; then his letters became less frequent, and they finally ceased when changes in the circumstances of both parties effaced their mutual interests. While the correspondence was in full flood, however, Goethe's letters leave us in no doubt

as to the real nature of his passion for Lotte; if words mean anything, his memories of her were a cause of mental unrest to which other distractions of the time gave a morbid direction, and which threatened to end in moral collapse.

A few extracts from his letters to Wetzlar will reveal his state of mind during the months that immediately followed his return to Frankfort. Within a week after his return we have these hurried lines addressed to Kestner: "God bless you, dear Kestner, and tell Lotte that I sometimes imagine I could forget her; but then comes the recitative, and I am worse than ever." In the same month (September) he again addresses Kestner: "I would not desire to have spent my days better than I did at Wetzlar, but God send me no more such days! . . . This I have just said to Lotte's silhouette." In the beginning of November he paid a flying visit to Wetzlar, and apparently had reason to regret it. "Certainly, Kestner," he wrote the day after he left, "it was time that I should go; yesterday evening, as I sat on the sofa, I had thoughts for which I deserve hanging." On Christmas Day he writes still at the same high pitch: "It is still night, dear Kestner, and I have risen to write again by the morning light, which recalls pleasant memories of past days. . . . Immediately on my arrival here I had pinned up Lotte's silhouette; while I was in Darmstadt they placed my bed here, and there to my great joy hangs Lotte's picture at its head." In April, 1773, Kestner and Lotte were married, and Goethe insisted, against Kestner's wish, on sending the bride her marriage-ring, which was accompanied by the following note: "May the remembrance of me as of this ring be ever with you in your happiness. Dear Lotte, after a long interval we shall see each other again, you with the ring on your finger, and me always *yours*. I affix no name nor surname. You know well who writes." A few days later we have the following words in a letter to Kestner: "To



part from Lotte, I do not yet understand how it was possible. . . . It cost me little, and yet I don't understand how it was possible. 'There is the rub.' In the course of the summer Kestner removed to Hanover, where he had received an official appointment, and took his wife with him. The correspondence then became less frequent, though on both sides it was maintained in the same friendly spirit. Only for a time, on the publication of *Werther*, as we shall see, was there the shadow of possible estrangement. "Alienated lovers," is Goethe's remark, already quoted, "become the best friends, if only they can be properly managed"; and Goethe showed himself an adept in this art of management.

While Goethe was pouring forth his confessions to Kestner and Lotte, his circumstances at home were not such as to conduce to calm of mind. Frankfort remained as distasteful to him as ever. "The Frankforters," he wrote to Kestner, "are an accursed folk; they are so pig-headed that nothing can be made of them." With his father his relations had not become more cordial after his return from Wetzlar. "Lieber Gott," he wrote on receiving a letter from his father, "shall I too become like this when once I am old? Shall my soul no longer attach itself to what is good and amiable? Strange the belief that the older a man becomes, the freer he becomes from what is worldly and petty. He becomes ever increasingly worldly and petty."<sup>1</sup> His father's insistence on his attention to legal business was a permanent cause of mutual misunderstanding. "I let my father do as he pleases; he daily seeks to enmesh me more and more in the affairs of the town, and I submit."<sup>2</sup>

In his sister Cornelia, as formerly, he had a sympathetic confidant equally in his affairs of the heart and in his literary and artistic ambitions, but in the course of the year 1773 he was deprived of her

<sup>1</sup> Goethe to Kestner, November 10, 1772.

<sup>2</sup> To the same, September 15, 1773.

soothing and stimulating influence. In October she was betrothed to J. G. Schlosser, who has already been noted as one of Goethe's sager counsellors, and the marriage took place on November 1. "I rejoice in their joy," he wrote to Sophie von la Roche, "though, at the same time, it is mostly to my own loss." Other friends, also, in the course of the same year, he complains, were departing and leaving him in dreary solitude. "My poor existence," he writes to Kestner, "is becoming petrified. This summer every one is going—Merck with the Court to Berlin, his wife to Switzerland, my sister, and Fräulein Flachsland, you, everybody. And I am alone. If I do not take a wife or hang myself, say that life is right dear to me, or something, if you like, which does me more honour."<sup>1</sup> So in May he describes himself as alone and daily becoming more so ; in October as "entirely alone," and as indescribably rejoiced at the return of Merck towards the close of the year.

<sup>1</sup> April 21, 1773.

## CHAPTER IX

### SATIRICAL DRAMAS AND FRAGMENTS

IF, during the year that followed his return from Wetzlar, Goethe was distracted by his wandering affections, he was no less divided in mind by his intellectual ambitions. The doubt which had possessed him since boyhood as to whether nature meant him for an artist or a poet remained still unsettled for him. In one of the best-known passages of his *Autobiography* he has related how he sought to resolve his difficulty. As he wandered down the banks of the Lahn, after he had torn himself away from Wetzlar, the beauty of the scenery awoke in him the artist's desire to transfer it worthily to canvas. The whim then occurred to him to let fate decide whether this was the work for which he was appointed. He would throw his knife into the river, and, if he saw it reach the surface, he would take it as a sign that art was his vocation. Unfortunately the oracle proved dubious. Owing to the intervening bushes he did not see the knife enter the river, but only the splash occasioned by its fall. As the result of the uncertainty of the oracle, he adds, he gave himself less assiduously than hitherto to the study of art. If this were indeed the case, it was only for a time, since the contemporary testimony, both of himself and of his friends, shows that during the period that immediately followed his leaving Wetzlar, art received more of his attention than literature. Goethe, wrote Caroline Flachsland to Herder, "still thinks of becoming a painter, and we strongly advise him to pursue that end."<sup>1</sup> "I am now quite a draughtsman,"

<sup>1</sup> November 27, 1772.



he himself wrote to Herder in December of the same year; and he tells another correspondent in the autumn of 1773 that "the plastic arts occupy him almost entirely."

Yet, since his return from Strassburg to Frankfurt in August, 1771, his literary activity was never wholly intermitted. During the remainder of that year he wrote the first draft of *Götz von Berlichingen*, and in 1772, mainly under the inspiration of the Darmstadt circle, he produced the poems to which attention has already been drawn. In that year, also, he shared in an undertaking the main object of which was to proclaim those revolutionary ideas in literature, religion, and life that inspired the movement of the *Sturm und Drang*. In co-operation with Herder, Merck and Schlosser, his future brother-in-law, and others, he conducted a journal which, under the title of *Die Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen*, expounded these views to all who chose to read it. Merck, and afterwards Schlosser, acted as editors during the year that it existed, but Goethe was the principal contributor. In the preliminary announcement to the first issue (January 1, 1772) it is stated that the reviews of books will range over science, philosophy, history, *belles-lettres*, and the fine arts, and particularly that no English book worthy of notice will escape attention. Of the successive reviews that appeared, only three are certainly known to be by Goethe, though he must have written or assisted in writing several others. With his usual causticity Herder characterized the manner of the two chief contributors. "You," he tells Merck, "are always Socrates-Addison; and Goethe is for the most part a young, arrogant lord, with horribly scraping cock's heels, and, if I come among you some day, I shall be the Irish Dean with his whip." Goethe himself, reviewing these early efforts in the light of his maturity, is sufficiently modest regarding their intrinsic merit. He had then, he says, neither the knowledge nor the discipline requisite for adequate

criticism. On the other hand, he claims to have given evidence of a gift, which no reader of his notices of books can fail to perceive, the gift of instinctive insight into the essentials of the subject in hand. In the business of reviewing, however, he seems to have taken little pleasure. "The day has begun festively," he wrote to Kestner on Christmas, 1772, "but, unfortunately, I must spoil the beautiful hours with reviewing; but I do so with a good heart, as it is for the last issue."<sup>1</sup>

To the same year, 1772, belong two short productions of Goethe which deserve a passing notice as exhibiting his strange blending of interests at this period. The one is entitled *Brief des Pastors zu . . . an den neuen Pastor zu . . .*, and professes to have been translated from the French. The Letter is another illustration of his interest in religion and in the interpretation of the Bible, which had begun with his early reading of the Old Testament and which his intercourse with Fräulein von Klettenberg and Herder had intermittently kept alive. The theological teaching of the Letter is, in point of fact, a compound of the teaching of these two. Its main object is to emphasize the necessity of toleration in the interest of religion itself, and nowhere was the monition more needed than in Frankfort, where the antipathy between those of the Reformed and the Lutheran communions was such as even to debar intermarriage. Rationalism and dogmatism are equally reprobated, and the sum of all true religion is found to consist in the love of God and of our neighbour. The strain of mystical piety which runs through the whole production doubtless proceeds from imaginative sympathy and not from personal experience, and is to be regarded only as another illustration of Goethe's facility in identifying himself with emotions essentially alien to his own nature.

<sup>1</sup> Goethe wrote the epilogue to the last number of the Review, of which he says to Kestner, "In einer Nachrede hab ich das Publikum und den Verleger turlupiniert." December, 1772.

The other piece, entitled *Zwei wichtige bisher unerörterte biblische Fragen, zum erstenmal gründlich beantwortet*, professing to be written by a Swabian pastor, is still more singular. In the first of the two questions he inquires whether it was the Ten Commandments or the prescriptions of ritual that were inscribed on the tables of stone, and concludes that it was the latter; and in the second he discusses the nature of the speaking with tongues that followed St. Paul's laying of hands on the newly baptized Christians, and resolves the question in a purely mythical sense.

The year 1773 marks an epoch in Goethe's career, and an epoch also in the literary history of Germany. In that year he made his first appeal as a writer to the great German public which was to follow his successive productions with varying degrees of admiration during the next half-century. Dissatisfied with the first draft of *Götz von Berlichingen* as lacking in dramatic unity, in the beginning (February—March) of 1773 he recast the whole play, which in its new form was published in June.<sup>1</sup> As has already been said, the second form of *Götz* is generally recognized as inferior to the first, but, such as it was, it made the sensation we have seen. With as much truth as Byron, Goethe might have said that "he woke one morning and found himself famous." In 1772 he could be spoken of by an intelligent person in Leipzig as "one named Gettë," and even in the circles he frequented he had hitherto been known simply as a youth of extraordinary promise from whom great things were to be expected. Henceforth his name was on the tongue of all who were interested in German literature, and whatever he was likely to produce in the future was certain to command universal interest.

According to Merck, Goethe's head was turned

<sup>1</sup> In its new form *Götz* was no better adapted for the stage. "Eine angeborne Unart ist schwierig zu meistern," is Goethe's own remark on his attempt to make it a good acting play.



for a time by the success of *Götz*. During the months that followed its publication, at all events, he was possessed with a wanton humour which spared neither friends nor foes, nor the society of which he had apparently caught the contagion as completely as any of its members. At a later date, Goethe speaks of his "considerate levity" and his "warm coolness";<sup>1</sup> and in a succession of pieces which he threw off at this time we have an interesting commentary on this characterization of himself. In these pieces we have an old vein reopened. We have seen how in Leipzig he had burlesqued the professor of literature, Clodius, but in the years that followed his departure from Leipzig—the depressing period in Frankfort and the period of rapid development in Strassburg—there was neither the occasion nor the prompting to personal or general satire. Now, however, in the tumult of his own feelings and in the follies of the society around him he found themes for satirical comment which afforded scope for a side of his genius rarely manifested in his later years. The short satirical dramas produced at this time on the mere impulse of the moment have in themselves only a local and temporary interest, but they derive importance from the fact that they proceed from the same mental attitude which was to find its definitive expression in the character of Mephistopheles—essentially the creation of this period of Goethe's development. In these trivial exercises he was practising the craft which is so consummately displayed in the original fragments of *Faust*.

The first of these sallies—*Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern, Ein Schönbartspiel*—was written in March, 1773, and was sent as a birthday gift to Merck—an appropriate recipient. Composed in doggerel verse, which Goethe took over from the shoemaker poet Hans Sachs, the piece brings before us the motley crowd of persons who frequented the fairs of the

<sup>1</sup> Ich bin wie immer der nachdenkliche Leichtsinn und die warme Kälte.—Goethe to Sophie von la Roche, September 1, 1780.

time, each vociferating the cheapness and excellence of his own wares. The humour of the spectacle, however, is that the *dramatis personæ* were individuals recognizable by contemporaries in traits which now escape us. Goethe himself appears in the guise of a doctor, Herder as a captain of the gipsies, and his bride, Caroline Flachsland, as a milkmaid. The satire is directed equally against the idiosyncrasies of individuals and against the follies of the time, the sentimentalism which Goethe himself had not escaped, but of which he saw the inanity, and the petty jealousies of authors which had also come within his personal experience. A mock tragedy on the subject of Esther, which forms part of the burlesque, is a malicious parody of the French models which he had begun by imitating, but which were now the sport of the youths who led the *Sturm und Drang*.

The *Jahrmarktsfest* is a genial explosion of mad-cap humour. Not so another succession of scenes produced about the same time. The subject of them is that Leuchsenring whose acquaintance, we have seen, Goethe had made under the roof of Sophie von la Roche. Since then, apparently, Leuchsenring's proceedings had provoked in Goethe a repugnance which displays itself in a strain of bitterness hardly to be found in any other of his works. It was Leuchsenring's habit to ingratiate himself with households where his pseudo-sentiment made him acceptable, and by questionable methods to make mischief between their members, and especially between the two sexes.<sup>1</sup> Goethe had seen the results of these intrigues in circles with which he was acquainted, and it was to punish the sinner that he wrote *Ein Fastnachtspiel, auch wohl zu tragieren nach Ostern, vom Pater Brey dem falschen Propheten*. Pater Brey, the false prophet, is Leuchsenring, and his sugared speech and shifty ways are the main object of the satire, but other persons are introduced into

<sup>1</sup> A quarrel had arisen between Merck and Leuchsenring, and Goethe had warmly taken Merck's side.

the piece and exhibited in lights which are a singular commentary on the taste of the time. The victim on whom Pater Brey plies his arts is Caroline Flachsland, who appears under the name of Leonora, and the injured lover is Herder (Captain Velandrino).<sup>1</sup> The Captain, who has been informed of Pater Brey's philanderings with his betrothed, appears on the scene, is assured of her faithfulness, and in concert with another character in the piece (Merck) plays a coarse trick on the Pater which makes him the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood.

Herder had good reason to resent the licence with which his private affairs had been obtruded on the public in *Pater Brey*,<sup>2</sup> but in the same year Goethe made him the main subject of another production which raises our astonishment equally at the manners of the time and at the wanton audacity of its author. In *Pater Brey* the prevailing sentimentalism, as veiling dubious motives, had been the theme of ridicule; in *Satyros, oder der vergötterte Waldteufel*, it was the extravagances of the followers of Rousseau in their idealization of the natural man. According to Kestner, as we have seen, Goethe himself greatly admired Rousseau, but was not one of his blind worshippers, and *Satyros* is a sufficiently cogent proof of the fact. What is astounding is the means he chose to give point to his ridicule. Herder is *Satyros*, the *Waldteufel*,<sup>3</sup> who is represented as being humanely received by a hermit (Merck) while suffering from a wounded leg. *Satyros* requites his host with coarse abuse of himself and his religion, flings his crucifix into the neighbouring stream, and steals a valuable piece of linen cloth. Next by an enchanting melody he cajoles two maidens, Arsinoë and Psyche (Caroline Flachsland), into the belief that he is a superhuman being, and Psyche is so

<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, Herder was jealous of Goethe's own attentions to Caroline.

<sup>2</sup> It was published in the autumn of the following year, 1774.

<sup>3</sup> W. Scherer was the first to identify Herder with *Satyros*.



overcome that she submits to his embraces. The people of the neighbourhood flock to him, see in him a new god, and on his persuasion take to eating chestnuts, as the natural food of man—the priest of the community, Hermes, joining in their worship. The hermit appears on the scene, and on his abusing Satyros for the theft of his crucifix, the people decide to offer him as a sacrifice to their insulted divinity. By a stratagem of the wife of Hermes, the hermit is rescued and the bestiality of Satyros exposed. In no way disconcerted, Satyros leaves the throng with flouts at their asinine attachment to their conventional morality as opposed to the free life inculcated by nature. Goethe's later comment on this remarkable production is that it was "a document of the godlike insolence of our youth," and certainly no document could bring more vividly before us the world in which Goethe's genius came to fruition.<sup>1</sup>

Still another piece of the "godlike insolence of youth," though less offensive in its implications, is the farce, *Götter, Helden, und Wieland*, written in the autumn of the same year, 1773. At an earlier period Wieland had been one of the gods of Goethe's idolatry, but Wieland was now the most distinguished champion of those French models against which Goethe and the youths associated with him had declared irreconcilable war. Moreover, in a journal recently started by Wieland, there had appeared an unfriendly review of *Götz von Berlichingen*. By the publication of a play, *Alceste*, in which he foolishly challenged comparison with Euripides' drama of the same name, Wieland gave the enemy his opportunity. On a Sunday afternoon, with a bottle of Burgundy beside him, as he tells us, Goethe tossed off his skit at one sitting. As a piece of improvisation, it certainly contains excellent fooling. We are introduced to the lower world, where three characters in Euripides' play, Admetus, Alcestis and

<sup>1</sup> *Satyros* was not published till 1814, after Herder's death, but he was aware of its existence,

Hercules, as well as its author and Mercury, are represented as in a state of high indignation at the liberties which Wieland has taken with them in producing his *Alceste*. Summoned before them, Wieland appears in his nightcap, and has to run the gauntlet of their several reproaches—the purport of them all being that he has foolishly misunderstood the Greek world which he had undertaken to portray. Against Goethe's wish the satire was published in the following year, and rapidly ran through four editions, but Wieland had a genteel revenge. With that *Lebensweisheit* which Goethe long afterwards marked as his characteristic, he published in his review a notice of the burlesque, in which it is recommended as “a masterpiece of persiflage and of sophistical wit.” “Wieland has turned the tables on me,” was Goethe's own admission; “Ich bin eben prostituiert.”<sup>1</sup>

These successive *jeux d'esprit* were merely the crackling fireworks of exuberant youth, and were regarded as such by their author himself. At the very time he was writing them, he was planning and sketching works, the scope of which reveals the true bent of his genius, and of the ideals that were preoccupying him. “My ideals,” he wrote to Kestner (September 15, 1773), “grow daily in beauty and grandeur”; and when he penned these words he was engaged on a production which, though it remained a mere fragment, has justly been regarded as one of the most striking manifestations of his powers. The subject, the myth of Prometheus, attracted him, he tells us, as one in which he could embody his own deepest experience and the conclusions regarding the individual life of man to which that experience had led him. In the crises of his past life, he declares, he had found that no aid had been forthcoming either from man or any supernal power. “We must tread the wine-press alone.” Only in one source had he discovered a stay and stimulus, which brought him the sense of individual

<sup>1</sup> Max Morris, *op. cit.* iv. 81.

self-subsistence—in the exercise of such creative talent as nature had bestowed upon him. Of this consciousness, no external power could deprive him, and it is this consciousness that is the governing idea of the fragment, and not the Titanism of the Prometheus of Æschylus. It was, moreover, an idea which permanently accompanied Goethe throughout life, and to which he frequently gave expression in his later correspondence.<sup>1</sup>

As, apart from its intrinsic power, *Prometheus* has an incidental interest in the history of philosophic thought, it may be worth while to sketch briefly the development it attained. When Prometheus is introduced to us, he is a rebel against Zeus and the other gods. He had rendered them allegiance so long as he believed that “they saw the past and the future in the present and were animated by self-originated and disinterested wisdom,” but, on the discovery of his error, he had renounced their authority, and, as an independent agent, he had fashioned images of human beings, to which, however, he was powerless to give the breath of life. In the first scene of the first Act, Mercury appears as the messenger of the gods and reasons with Prometheus on the folly of his contending with their omnipotence. Prometheus denies their omnipotence either over nature or over himself. “Can they separate me from myself?” he asks, and Mercury admits that the gods are subject to a power stronger than their own—the power of Fate. “Go, then,” is the reply, “I do not serve vassals.” After a brief soliloquy, in which Prometheus expresses the passionate wish that he might impart feeling to his lifeless images,

<sup>1</sup> The following passage from an article in the *Hibbert Journal*, by M. Bergson (October, 1911, pp. 42-43), is an interesting commentary on Goethe's conception: “If, then, in every province the triumph of life is expressed by creation, might we not think that the ultimate reason of human life is a creation which, in distinction from that of the artist or man of science, can be pursued at every moment and by all men alike; I mean the creation of self by self, the continual enrichment of personality, by elements which it does not draw from outside, but causes to spring forth from itself?”



Epimetheus appears as a second representative of the gods. Their offer, he tells Prometheus, is reasonable; let him but recognize their supremacy, and he will be free of the heights of Olympus, from which he would rule the earth. "Yes," is the reply, "to be their burggrave, and defend their Heaven! My offer is more reasonable; their wish is to be a partner with me, and my thought is to have nothing to participate with them; they cannot rob me of what I have, and what they have, let them guard. Here is mine, and here is thine, and so are we apart." "But what is thine?" inquires Epimetheus; and the reply is, "The circle which my activity fulfils—*Der Kreis, den meine Wirksamkeit erfüllt.*" And here follows one of the passages in the dialogue which, as expressing the pantheistic conception of the universe, gave occasion to the quarrel of the philosophers, to be presently noted. "Thou standest alone," is the comment of Epimetheus on the claim to independent self-subsistence asserted by Prometheus; "thou standest alone; thy self-will fails to appreciate the bliss of the gods—thou, thine, the world and heaven, all feel themselves one intimate whole." Repelled like Mercury, Epimetheus departs, and Minerva, in whom Prometheus acknowledges his sole inspirer and instructress, appears. Minerva, who declares that she honours her father Zeus and loves Prometheus, repeats the offer of Zeus to animate the clay images if Prometheus will acknowledge his sovereignty; but when Prometheus passionately refuses to accept the offer, she bursts forth: "And they shall live! to fate and not to the gods it pertains to bestow life and to take it. Come, I conduct thee to the source of all life, which Jupiter may not close against us. They shall live, and through thee!"

Of the second Act only two scenes were written. In the first, Mercury, proclaiming in Olympus that Minerva has given life to the clay images of Prometheus, calls on Zeus to destroy the new creatures

with his thunder. Zeus calmly replies that they will only increase the number of his servants, and Mercury, changing his tone, prays that he may be sent to "the poor earthborn folk," to announce the goodness and wisdom of the father of all. "Not yet," is the reply. "In the newborn rapture of youth they dream that they are like unto the gods. Not till they need thee will they listen to thy words. Leave them to their own life!" In the second scene, we see Prometheus in a valley at the base of Olympus, surrounded by the new race of animated beings engaged in business or pleasure. There follow three brief scenes which are meant to depict the dawning of human consciousness and the conditions under which life is to be lived. To one Prometheus shows how a hut for shelter may be constructed out of branches lopped with the aid of an implement of stone. In a dispute between two men, one of whom wounds the other and steals his goat, he pronounces the judgment that the hand of the offender will be against every man, and every man's hand against him. In the third and last scene we have the most remarkable passage in the poem. Pandora, Prometheus' favourite creation, in dismay and bewilderment, describes the strange experience she has witnessed in the case of a friend, another maiden, and Prometheus tells her that what she had seen was death. What death meant Prometheus explains in the following passage, charged with the sensuous mysticism which was one of the elements of Goethe's own experiences when he wrote it:—

Wenn aus dem innerst tiefsten Grunde  
Du ganz erschüttert alles fühlst,  
Was Freud' und Schmerzen jemals dir ergossen,  
Im Sturm dein Herz erschwillt,  
In Tränen sich erleichtern will,  
Und seine Glut vermehrt,  
Und alles klingt an dir und bebt und zittert,  
Und all die Sinne dir vergehn,  
Und du dir zu vergehen scheinst  
Und sinkst,

Und alles um dich her versinkt in Nacht,  
 Und du, in immer eigenstem Gefühl,  
 Umfassest eine Welt;  
 Dann stirbt der Mensch.

When from thy inmost being's depths  
 Shattered to nought thou feelest all  
 Of joy and woe that e'er to thee hath flowed,  
 In storm thy heart hath swelled,  
 In tears doth find itself relief,  
 And doth its glow increase;  
 When all within thee thrills, and quakes, and quivers,  
 And all thy senses from thee part,  
 And from thyself to part thou seem'st,  
 And sink'st,  
 And all around thee sinketh deep in night,  
 And thou within thyself, thy very self  
 Encompassdest a world;  
 Then dies the man.

To these two Acts Goethe subsequently added, as the opening of a third Act, a soliloquy of Prometheus, written in the following year. In this soliloquy Prometheus appears as the sheer Titan, the burden of his defiance being that Zeus merits no worship from men to whose miseries he is deaf, and that such worship as he receives proceeds only from human folly and ignorance.<sup>1</sup> By its protest against the conception of the mechanical god who "pushes the universe from without," and by the Spinozistic pantheism which it implicitly proclaims, the ode dismayed the more timid spirits of the time. To the horror of Fritz Jacobi, Lessing, to whom he read it in manuscript in 1780, declared that its conception of the *ἐν καὶ πάν* was his own;<sup>2</sup> and when, in 1785, Jacobi published the poem without Goethe's knowledge, a controversy arose in which Lessing was charged with atheism and pantheism, and which, as

<sup>1</sup> Viktor Hehn pointed out that the drama and the ode are inspired by different motives, and that it was in forgetfulness that Goethe associated them.—*Ueber Goethe's Gedichte*, p. 160. Bielschowsky (*Goethe, Sein Leben und Seine Werke*, i. 510) suggests that the ode may have been intended as the opening of Act ii.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Frederick Pollock dates "modern Spinozism" from this incident.—*Spinoza: His Life and Opinions* (London, 1880), p. 390.



Goethe records, cost the life of one of the combatants, Moses Mendelssohn.<sup>1</sup> Be it said that in his old age Goethe himself came to regard the sentiments of the soliloquy as *sansculottisch*, and in the time of reaction of the Holy Alliance forbade the publication of the fragment as likely to be received as an evangel by the revolutionary youth of Germany.<sup>2</sup>

To the same period as *Prometheus* belongs another fragment, inspired by an equally grandiose conception, which, like so many others with Goethe, was never to be realized. The theme of the projected drama was to be the career of Mahomet, and in his Autobiography Goethe has indicated the leading ideas it was to embody. Contrary to the prevailing opinion, which had received brilliant expression in Voltaire's play on the same subject, Mahomet was to be represented not as an impostor but as a prophet sincerely convinced of the truth of his message, and inflamed with a disinterested desire to give his countrymen a purer religion—a view of Mahomet, it may be said in passing, which Goethe's disciple, Carlyle, was amongst the first to proclaim in this country.<sup>3</sup> The successive actions of the prophet were to illustrate the influence which character and genius combined have exercised on the destiny of men; but they were also to illustrate how the idealist in his contact with actualities is forced, in spite of himself, to compromise the purity of his original message, and, in consequence, to deteriorate in his own personal character.<sup>4</sup> Of the projected drama we have only two

<sup>1</sup> While writing a defence of his friend Lessing against the charge of atheism, Mendelssohn's mental agitation was such that it was believed to have occasioned his death.

<sup>2</sup> Turgeneff relates that on translating passages from *Satyros* and *Prometheus* to Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt, and Daudet, all three were profoundly impressed by the range and power displayed in them.

<sup>3</sup> It is one of the ironies of Goethe's literary career that, in his later years, in the period of his reaction against the formlessness that had invaded German literature, he, with the approval of Schiller, translated Voltaire's *Mahomet*, and staged it in Weimar.

<sup>4</sup> It is this conception, as he himself tells us, that Renan applied to the life and teaching of Jesus.

scenes, and a lyric in glorification of Mahomet which was to be sung by two of the characters. In contrast to *Prometheus*, not pantheism but monotheism, and not rebellion but submission, were to be the animating creed and motive of the protagonist. In the first of the two scenes he addresses in succession the great heavenly lights, but in their mutability he finds no stay or solace for mind and heart, and he turns to the creator of them all. "Uplift thee, loving heart, to the creating One! Be thou my Lord, my God! Thou, all-loving One, Thou who didst create earth, heaven, and me." In the second scene we have a dialogue between Mahomet and his foster-mother, Fatima, in which he communicates the religious experiences which it was to be his mission to proclaim to his people; and the manner in which Fatima receives them indicates the difficulties he would have to encounter in his rôle as prophet. "He is changed; his nature is transformed; his understanding has suffered. Better it is that I should restore him to his kinsfolk, than that I should draw the responsibility of evil consequences upon myself." But, as in the case of *Prometheus*, it is in the lyric that was to form part of the drama that we have the most arresting expression of the poet's genius—another proof of the fact that at this period it was in the lyric that Goethe found the most adequate utterance for what was deepest in his nature. In a rush of unrhymed, irregular measures it describes the course of a river (the Rhine was in the poet's mind) from its source on the mountain summit; its impetuous progress among the obstacles that bar its passage; its gradually broadening current as it sweeps through the plains, undelayed by shady valley or by the flowers that adorn its banks; and its final losing of itself in the ocean with all its tributary streams.

As sung by Ali and Fatima on the death of Mahomet, the ode was an allegory of his life from its beginning to its triumphant close when he passed from the present with the consciousness that he had

won to his faith the nation from which he had sprung. But it also undoubtedly expressed the aspiration of the poet himself. The ambition to impress himself on the world, and the consciousness of powers to give effect to his ambition, were indeed the ruling impulses behind all his distracted activities. But he was thwarted in his ambition alike by external circumstances and by his own temperament, and there came occasions when he was disposed to accept failure as his wisest choice. In two poems of this period he gives expression to this mood, and the necessity for overcoming it. In the one, *Adler und Taube*, a young eagle is wounded by a fowler, but after three days recovers, though with disabled wings. Two doves alight near the spot, and one of them addresses soothing words to the crippled king of the birds. "Thou art in sorrow," he coos; "be of good courage, friend! hast thou not here all that peaceful bliss requires? . . . O friend, true happiness is content, and everywhere content has enough." "O wise one," spoke the eagle, and, moved to deep earnest, sinks more deeply into himself; "O wisdom! thou speakest like a dove." In the other poem, *Künstlers Erdewallen* ("The Artist's Earthly Pilgrimage"), composed in the form of a dialogue, we have equally a draft from Goethe's own experience. To provide for his family needs, the artist is forced to prostitute his genius by painting pictures for the vulgar *connoisseur*, and he desponds at the prospect of a life spent under such conditions, but the muse whispers consolation: "Thou hast time enough to take delight in thyself, and in every creation which thy brush lovingly depicts." It was a consolation which at this time and at other periods of his life Goethe had to take home to himself.



## CHAPTER X

### WERTHER AND CLAVIGO

1774

IN his fortieth year Goethe wrote to Wieland: "Without compulsion, there is in my case no hope."<sup>1</sup> So it was with him at every period of his life; without some immediate impulse out of his own experience, or from the urgency of friends, he was incapable of the sustained inspiration requisite to the execution of a prolonged artistic whole. We have seen how he dallied with the subject of *Götz von Berlichingen*, and how it was only at the instance of his sister Cornelia that he concentrated his energies in throwing it into dramatic form. In the case of *Werther* we have an illustration of the same characteristic. Shortly after leaving Wetzlar, on hearing the news of Jerusalem's death, there arose in him a pressing desire to embody his late experience in some imaginative shape; and in the course of the following year he actually addressed himself to the task. But his inspiration flagged, and it was not till the beginning of 1774 that a new experience supplied a fresh impulse constraining him to complete the "prodigious little work" which was to take his contemporaries by storm.

We have it from Goethe's own hand that it was a new and "painful situation" that gave him the necessary stimulus to resume his work on *Werther* and to carry it to a conclusion. We have seen how

<sup>1</sup> In his sixty-second year Goethe also said of himself: "Denn gewöhnlich, was ich ausspreche, das tue ich nicht, und was ich verspreche, das halte ich nicht."

on leaving Wetzlar in the autumn of 1772 he had made the acquaintance of the family von la Roche, and how he had been captivated by the elder daughter, Maximiliane. Since then he had kept up a sentimental correspondence with the mother in which we have occasional references to his continued interest in the daughter. "Your Maxe," he wrote in August, 1773, "I cannot do without so long as I live, and I shall always venture to love her." This was, of course, in the current style of the time, but a situation arose which made such amorous trifling dangerous. On January 9, 1774, the Fräulein von la Roche was married to Peter Brentano, a dealer in herrings, oil, and cheese, a widower with five children, with whom she settled at Frankfort. Goethe immediately became an assiduous frequenter of the Brentano household, where he was not unwelcome to the young wife, whose new surroundings were in unpleasant contrast to those of the home she had left. But Brentano was not so magnanimous as Kestner, and a fortnight had not passed before there were "painful scenes" between him and Goethe. On the 21st Goethe wrote as follows to the mother of Madame Brentano: "If you knew what passed within me before I avoided the house, you would not think, dear Mama, of luring me back to it again. I have in these frightful moments suffered for all the future; I am now at peace, and in peace let me remain."<sup>1</sup> He had now gone the round of all the experiences embodied in *Werther*; on February 1 he resumed the discontinued work, and, writing "almost in a state of somnambulism," finished it in a few weeks.

But besides his own immediate personal experience, there went other influences to the production of *Werther* which affected alike its form and its contents. In his Autobiography Goethe has minutely analysed these influences, and the most potent of them he traces to the impression made by English literature on himself and his contemporaries. What

<sup>1</sup> January 21, 1774.

impressed them as the prevailing note of that literature was a melancholy disillusion which regarded life as a sorry business at the best, and Goethe specifies Young, Gray, and Ossian as representative interpreters of this mood. In verses like these, he says, we have the precise expression of the moral disease which he has depicted in *Werther* :—

To griefs congenial prone.

More wounds than nature gave he knew ;

While misery's form his fancy drew

In dark ideal hues and horrors not its own !<sup>1</sup>

If English literature contributed to the tone of feeling in *Werther*, it also, though Goethe does not mention the fact, suggested the literary form in which it is cast. In the case of his former loves, his emotions had found vent in a succession of lyrics thrown off as occasion prompted, but his later experiences had been of a more complex nature, and demanded a larger canvas for their development. It would appear that Goethe's original intention was to adopt the dramatic form which had been so successful in the case of *Götz*, and we are led to believe that, in accordance with this intention, he actually made a beginning of his work. In the interval between his discontinuing and resuming it, however, he changed his mind ; and in the form in which we have it *Werther* is mainly composed of letters addressed by its central character to an absent friend. There can be little doubt that the epistolary form was suggested by a book with which Goethe was familiar, and which had been received with enthusiasm in Germany as in other continental countries—Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747–8). Richardson's example, moreover, had been followed in another work which had achieved as sensational a success as *Clarissa*—Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*. In form and substance *Werther* was as much in-

<sup>1</sup> These lines are by the Earl of Rochester. On reading the first English translation of *Werther* (1783), Goethe wrote : " It gave me much pleasure to read my thoughts in the language of my instructors."



spired by Richardson and Rousseau as *Götz* had been by Shakespeare, yet in *Werther*, as in *Götz*, the world recognized an original creation which bore a new message to every heart capable of receiving it.

The portentous work was published in the autumn of 1774, but the form in which we now have it belongs to a later date. In the first complete edition of Goethe's Works (1787), *Werther* appeared with certain modifications, which did not, however, as in the case of *Götz*, organically affect its original form.<sup>1</sup> Expressions which to Goethe's maturer taste appeared objectionable were altered—not always, German critics are disposed to think, in the direction of improvement; the story of the unfortunate peasant in whose fate *Werther* saw an image of his own, was introduced; and, in deference to the feelings of Kestner and Lotte, the characters of the two persons in the book with whom readers identified them were presented in a somewhat more favourable light.<sup>2</sup>

With what degree of similitude Goethe has portrayed himself in the character of *Werther* must necessarily be matter of opinion, but that his work was essentially drawn from his own experience the merest outline of it conclusively shows. Equally in the case of the two parts of which the book is composed we have the presentment of successive phases of emotion through which we know that he had himself passed when he sat down to write it. The first part, the substance of which was probably drafted in the year 1773, is all but an exact transcript of Goethe's own experience from the day he settled in Wetzlar till the day he left it. Like Goethe himself, *Werther* settles in the spring of the year in a country town, unattractive like Wetzlar, but also, like Wetzlar, situated in a charming neighbourhood. His first few weeks there are spent as Goethe

<sup>1</sup> In making these modifications Goethe was advised by Herder and Wieland.

<sup>2</sup> Though to the satisfaction of neither Kestner nor Lotte.

spent them—in daydreaming and vague longings; finding distraction alternately in sketching, in reading Homer, in intercourse with children and simple people, in contemplations on nature and the life of man, inspired by Spinoza and Rousseau. Then befalls the incident which also befell Goethe: he meets a girl at a ball, and he is overmastered by a passion which changes the current of his life and paralyses every other motive at its source. At the first meeting Werther learns that Charlotte is betrothed,<sup>1</sup> but her betrothed is absent, and, oblivious of the future, he for a few weeks lives in a state of intoxicating bliss. Albert, who, like Charlotte, has in the first part all the characteristics of his original, at length appears on the scene, and all three are gradually convinced that the situation is intolerable. There are “painful scenes,” such as, according to Kestner, actually happened in Goethe’s own case; and after an agonizing struggle with himself Werther succeeds in breaking away from the enchanted spot, the last conversation between the three turning on the prospect of a future life—a memory, as we have seen, of an actual talk between Lotte, Kestner, and Goethe. So ends the first part, which, with unimportant variations, is a close record of the circumstances of Goethe’s own sojourn in Wetzlar.

A tragic end to *Werther* Goethe had before him from its first conception, as is proved by his eagerness to ascertain the details of Jerusalem’s suicide. But to justify dramatically such an end to his hero, certain modifications in the relations of all the three characters were rendered necessary, and again his own experience suggested the mode of treatment. In the uncomfortable relations that had arisen between himself and the Brentanos, husband and wife, he found a situation which would naturally involve a catastrophe in the case of a character constituted like Werther. When in February, 1774,

<sup>1</sup> It was shortly after his meeting with Lotte Buff that Goethe learned that she was engaged to Kestner.

therefore, he sat down to complete the tale of Werther's woes, it was under a new inspiration that the characters of Albert and Charlotte fashioned themselves in his mind. Not Kestner and Lotte Buff, but the Brentanos, suggested their leading traits as well as the relations of all parties, which involved the closing tragedy. Albert becomes a jealous and somewhat morose husband, and Charlotte is depicted with the characteristics of Maxe Brentano rather than of Lotte Buff—with a more susceptible temperament and less self-control.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening of the second part the character of Werther is further revealed in a new set of circumstances. Against his own inclinations he accepts an official appointment under an ambassador at a petty German Court, and his helpless unfitness in this situation for the ordinary business of life may be regarded as a commentary on Goethe's own invincible distaste for the practice of his profession. Werther finds the ambassador intolerable; and a public insult to which, as a commoner, he is subjected at a social gathering of petty nobility, drives him to resign his post. After a few months' residence with a prince, whose company in the end he finds uncongenial, he is irresistibly drawn to the scenes of his former happiness and misery. But in the interval an event happens which makes the renewal of old relations impossible. Charlotte and Albert have married, and the sight of Albert enjoying the privileges of a husband is a constant reminder of the hopelessness of his passion. Blank despair gradually takes possession of Werther's soul; in the hopeless wail of Ossian he finds the only adequate expression of his fate.<sup>2</sup> In the commentary which Goethe introduces to prepare readers for Werther's suicide, he suggests another motive for the act besides Werther's infatuation for

<sup>1</sup> Goethe gave the blue eyes of Maxe to Charlotte. Lotte Buff's eyes were brown.

<sup>2</sup> "Werther," Goethe remarked to Henry Crabb Robinson, "praised Homer while he retained his senses, and Ossian when he was going mad."



Charlotte, which Napoleon as well as other critics have regarded as a mistake in art. In his state of mental and moral paralysis, we are told, Werther recalled all the misfortunes of his past life, and specially the mortification he had received during his brief official experience. But on the mind of the reader this incidental suggestion of other motives makes little impression; he feels that Werther's helpless abandonment to his passion for Charlotte is the central interest of the author himself, as it is a wholly adequate cause of the final catastrophe.

By the fullness of its revelation of himself and by the impression it made on the public mind *Werther* holds a unique place among the longer productions of Goethe. His own testimony, both at the time when it was written and in his later years, is conclusive proof of the degree to which it was a "general confession," as he himself calls it. "I have lent my emotions to his [Werther's] history," he wrote shortly after the completion of his work; "and so it makes a wonderful whole."<sup>1</sup> In one of the best-known passages of his Autobiography he tells how he morbidly dallied with the idea of suicide, and banished the obsession only by convincing himself that he had not the courage to plunge a dagger into his breast. In a remarkable passage, written in his sixty-third year to his Berlin friend, Zelter, whose son had committed suicide, he recalls with all seriousness the hypochondriacal promptings which in his own case might have driven him to the fate of Werther. "When the *tædium vitæ* takes possession of a man," he wrote, "he is to be pitied and not to be blamed. That all the symptoms of this wonderful, equally natural and unnatural, disease at one time also convulsed my inmost being, *Werther*, indeed, leaves no one in doubt. I know right well what resolves and what efforts it cost me at that time to escape the waves of death, as from many a later shipwreck I painfully rescued myself and with

<sup>1</sup> April 26, 1774.

painful struggles recovered my health of mind." At a still later date (1824) Goethe expressed himself with equal emphasis to the same purport. "That is a creation [*Werther*]," he told Eckermann, "which I, like the pelican, fed with the blood of my own heart. There is in it so much that was deepest in my own experience, so much of my own thoughts and sensations, that, in truth, a romance extending to ten such volumes might be made out of it. Since its appearance, I have read it only once, and have refrained from doing so again. It is nothing but a succession of rockets. I am uneasy when I look at it, and dread the return of the psychological condition out of which it sprang."

These repeated statements of Goethe, made at wide intervals of his life, sufficiently prove what a large part of himself went to the making of *Werther*. Yet *Werther* was not Goethe. From the fate of *Werther* he was saved by two characteristics of which we have seen frequent evidence in his previous history. It was not in his nature to be dominated for any lengthened period by a single passion to the exclusion of every other interest. No sooner had he left Wetzlar than his heart was open to the charms of Maxe Brentano, and, during the months that followed, her image and that of Lotte Buff alternately distracted his susceptibilities. Byron declared that he was capable of only one passion at a time, but Goethe was always capable of at least two. The other characteristic equally distinguishes Goethe from *Werther*. "I turn in upon myself," *Werther* writes, "and find a world—but a world of presentiments and of dim desires, not a world of definite outlines and of living force." Of a "living force" in himself Goethe was never wholly unconscious; the record of his creative efforts during the months that followed his leaving Wetzlar are sufficient evidence of the fact. The intellectual side of his nature—the impulse to know or to create—kept in check the emotional, and proved his

safeguard in more crises than the Wertherian period during which, by his own testimony, he so narrowly escaped shipwreck.

The imprint of Goethe's character and genius which *Werther* made on the mind of his contemporaries was never effaced during his lifetime, and was even a source of embarrassment to him in his future development. For years after its appearance he found it necessary to travel *incognito* to avoid being pointed at as "the author of *Werther*"; and in the case of each of his subsequent productions the reading public had a feeling of disappointment that they were not receiving what they expected from the writer who had once so profoundly moved them. In truth, probably no book ever given to the world has made such an instantaneous, profound, and general sensation as *Werther*. The effect of *Götz von Berlichingen* had as yet been confined to Germany; on the publication of *Werther* its author became a European figure in the world of letters. In Germany *Werther* was hawked about as a chap-book; within three years three translations appeared in France, and five years after its publication it was translated into English. The dress worn by Werther (borrowed from England), consisting of a blue coat, yellow vest, yellow hose, and top-boots, became the fashion of the day and was sported even in Paris.

Opinion in Germany had been divided on *Götz von Berlichingen*, but the conflicting judgments on that work had turned only on questions of dramatic propriety. The questions raised by *Werther*, on the other hand, appeared to many to concern the very foundations of morality and of human responsibility. Suicide, it was indignantly clamoured, was sophistically justified in the person of Werther, and was clothed in such specious hues as to present it in the light of a natural means of escape from the troubles of life. On the ground of these supposed sinister implications the sale of *Werther* was prohibited in Leipzig under a penalty of ten thalers, a translation



of it was forbidden in Denmark, and the Archbishop of Milan ordered it to be publicly burned in that town. There was, of course, no thought in Goethe's mind of recommending suicide by the example of Werther, but he felt the reproach keenly, and indignantly repudiated it. Yet, when a few years later, a young woman was found drowned in the Ilm at Weimar with a copy of *Werther* in her pocket, he was painfully reminded that the book might be of dangerous consequence to a certain class of minds.<sup>1</sup>

*Werther* has been described as "the act of a conqueror and a high-priest of art,"<sup>2</sup> and of the truth of this description we have interesting proof from Goethe's own hand. In *Werther* he had not only given to the world a likeness of himself; in Albert and Charlotte he had exhibited two figures who were at once identified as Kestner and Lotte, now Kestner's wife. It was not only that domestic privacy was thus invaded, but the characters assigned to Albert and Charlotte were such as could not fail to give just offence to their originals. Yet in the triumph of the artist it seems never to have occurred to Goethe that Kestner and Lotte would resent the licence he had taken with them. On the eve of the publication of *Werther* he sent a copy of it to Lotte, informing her at the same time that he had kissed it a thousand times before sending it, and praying her not to make it public till it was given to the world at the approaching Leipzig fair. It came as a surprise to him, therefore, when he received a letter of reproach from Kestner, protesting against the injurious presentment of himself and his wife in the book. In a first reply, Goethe frankly admitted his indiscretion,

<sup>1</sup> The judgment of Lessing, who had no sympathy with the effeminate sentimentality of the time, was severe. "We cannot," he said, "imagine a Greek or a Roman Werther; it was the Christian ideal that had made such a character possible." Goethe, he thought, should have added a cynical chapter (the more cynical the better) to put Werther's character in its true light. As the friend of Jerusalem, Lessing naturally resented the liberty which Goethe had taken with him.

<sup>2</sup> By Sainte-Beuve.

but in a second letter he took a bolder tone. "Oh! ye unbelieving ones, I would proclaim ye of little faith," he wrote. "Could you but realize the thousandth part of what *Werther* is to a thousand hearts, you would not reckon the cost it has been to you."<sup>1</sup> Lotte and Kestner, from all we know of them, were both persons of sound nature, not unduly sensitive, and, in their hearts, they may not have been displeased at their association with the brilliant youth of genius on whom the eyes of the world were now turned. At all events, neither appears to have borne him a permanent grudge for presenting them to the public in such a dubious light. Though, as has already been said, correspondence between Goethe and them gradually became more and more intermittent, mutual respect and cordiality remained, and in later years we find Goethe in the capacity of sage adviser to the prudent Kestner.<sup>2</sup>

The subsequent influence of *Werther* was at once more powerful and more enduring than the influence of *Götz von Berlichingen*, and Goethe himself has suggested the reason. The so-called *Werther* "period," he says, belongs to no special age of the world's culture, but to the life of every free spirit that chafes under obsolete traditions, obstructed happiness, cramped activity, and unfulfilled desires. "A sorry business it would be," he adds, "if once in his life every one did not pass through an epoch when *Werther* appeared to have been specially written for him."<sup>3</sup> The long series of imitations of *Werther*—*René*, *Obermann*, *Childe Harold*, *Adolphe* (to mention only the best-known)—bears out Goethe's remark that *Wertherism* belongs to no particular age of the world, though it may assume various forms and be

<sup>1</sup> November 21, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> The family of Kestner eventually published the correspondence of Goethe with their parents.—A. Kestner, *Goethe und Werther, Briefe Goethes, meistens aus seiner Jugendzeit, mit erläuternden Documenten* (Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1854).

<sup>3</sup> Eckermann, *op. cit.*, January 2, 1824.

expressed in different tones.<sup>1</sup> But in Goethe's little book the name and the thing Wertherism has received its "immortal *cachet*." To the intrinsic power of *Werther* it is the supreme tribute that Napoleon, the first European man in the world of action, as Goethe was the first in the world of thought, read it seven times in the course of his life, that he carried it with him as his companion in his Egyptian campaign, and that in his interview with Goethe he made it the principal theme of their conversation. To the literary youth of Germany, we are told, *Werther* no longer appeals; but such statements can be based only on conjecture, and we may be certain that in all countries there are still to be found readers to whom the record of Werther's woes seems to have been written for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

By a curious coincidence Goethe had hardly made a "general confession" in the writing of *Werther* when he was led to make another "confession" in a work of less resounding notoriety, but equally interesting as a revelation of himself. In his Autobiography he has related the origin of the piece. In the spring of 1774 there fell into his hands the recently published *Mémoires*<sup>3</sup> of the French playwright Beaumarchais, which told a story that reawakened painful memories of his own past. Beaumarchais had two sisters in Madrid, one married to an architect; the other, named Marie, betrothed to Clavigo, a publicist of rising fame. On Clavigo's promotion to the post of royal archivist he throws his betrothed over, and the news of his faithlessness brings Beaumarchais to Madrid. In an interview with Clavigo he compels him, under the threat of a duel, to write and subscribe a confession of his unjustifiable

<sup>1</sup> The *accidie* of the Middle Ages was a form of Wertherism. Cf. Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*.

<sup>2</sup> It may be recalled that *Werther* was throughout his life one of R. L. Stevenson's favourite books. See his Letter to Mrs. Sitwell, September 6, 1773, and ch. xix. of *The Wrecker*.

<sup>3</sup> *Fragment de mon voyage d'Espagne*.—*Mémoires de Monsieur Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais*, tome ii.



treachery. To avert exposure, however, Clavigo offers to renew his engagement to Marie, and Beaumarchais accepts the condition. Clavigo again plays false, and obtains from the authorities an order expelling Beaumarchais from Madrid. Through the good offices of a retired Minister, however, Beaumarchais succeeds in communicating the whole story to the king, with the result that Clavigo is dismissed from his post.

We see the points in the narrative of Beaumarchais which must have touched Goethe to the quick. He also had played the false lover to Friederike Brion, who, however, unlike Marie, had no brother to call him to account. It was characteristic of him that, on reading the *Mémoire*, it at once struck him as affording an appropriate theme for dramatic treatment, and it was further characteristic that he needed an immediate stimulus to incite him to the task. He has told us how the stimulus came. As a diversion to relieve the monotony of Frankfort society, the youths and maidens of Goethe's circle had arranged for a time to play at married couples, and, as it happened, the same maiden fell thrice to Goethe's lot.<sup>1</sup> At one of the meetings of the couples he read aloud the narrative of Beaumarchais, and his partner suggested that he should turn it into a play. The suggestion, he relates, supplied the needed stimulus, and a week later the completed play was read to the reassembled circle.

The first four Acts of the play, which Goethe entitled *Clavigo*, are simply the narrative of Beaumarchais cut into scenes, and they contain long passages directly translated from the original—a proceeding which Goethe justifies by the example of "our progenitor Shakespeare." In the first scene of the first Act we are introduced to Clavigo and Carlos discussing the prospects of the former. Clavigo,

<sup>1</sup> Of all the women who came in her son's way, Frau Goethe thought that this lady, Anna Sibylla Münch by name, would have made him the most suitable partner in life.

who is represented as a publicist of genius, with a great career before him, is distracted by the conflict between his ambition and the sense of honour and gratitude which should bind him to his betrothed Marie, a sickly girl, by position and character unsuited to be the helpmate of an ambitious man of the world. Unstable and irresolute, he is as clay in the hands of Carlos, who plays the part of the shrewd and cynical adviser to his friend, in whose genius and brilliant future he has unbounded confidence. As the result of their talk, Clavigo decides with some compunction to abandon Marie, and, as his fortunes rise, to find a more suitable mate. In the second scene the other characters of the play are brought before us—Marie Beaumarchais, her sister Sophie, married to Guilbert, an architect, and Don Buenco, a disappointed lover of Marie. The theme of their conversation is the ingratitude and faithlessness of Clavigo, to whom, however, Marie, dying of consumption, still clings with fond idolatry. At the close of the scene Beaumarchais appears, breathing vengeance on Clavigo if he finds him without justification for his conduct. In the second Act, which consists of only one scene, Beaumarchais carries out his purpose and compels Clavigo under threat of a duel to write with his own hand an abject acknowledgment of his baseness. In consistency with his fickle nature, however, Clavigo prays Beaumarchais to report to Marie his unfeigned remorse and his desire to renew their former relations. Beaumarchais agrees to convey the message, and departs under the impression that he has saved the honour of his sister. In the third Act Clavigo and Marie are reconciled, their marriage is arranged, and Beaumarchais destroys the incriminating document. The fourth Act consists of two scenes. In the first, Carlos convinces Clavigo of his folly in compromising his career by a foolish union, and persuades him to break his pledge, undertaking to get Beaumarchais out of the way. The second scene represents the dismay of the

Guilbert household on the discovery of Clavigo's renewed treachery, Beaumarchais vowing vengeance on the double-dyed traitor, and Marie in a dying state attended by a hastily-summoned physician. In the fifth Act the play breaks with the narrative of Beaumarchais, which does not supply material for the necessary tragic conclusion, and is based on an old German ballad, with an evident recollection of the scene of Hamlet and Laertes at the grave of Ophelia. While stealing from his house under cover of night, as had been arranged with Carlos, Clavigo passes the Guilbert's door, where he sees three mourners standing with torches in their hands. On inquiry he learns that Marie Beaumarchais is dead; and presently the body is brought forth attended by Guilbert, Don Buenco, and Beaumarchais. Then ensues a passionate scene in which Beaumarchais slays Clavigo, and the Act closes with expressions of tenderness and compunction on the part of all the chief persons concerned.

In a letter to a friend<sup>1</sup> Goethe explained that in writing *Clavigo* he had blended the character and action of Beaumarchais with characters and actions drawn from his own experience; and this description strictly corresponds with the play as we have it. Though in the first four Acts, as we have seen, the incidents are directly taken from Beaumarchais and many passages in them are simply translations, the characters of the leading personages—Clavigo, Carlos, Marie, and Beaumarchais—are entirely of Goethe's own creation. Moreover, in what is original in the dialogues there are touches everywhere introduced which are not to be found in the original, and which are precisely those that are of special interest for the student of Goethe. Of the play as a work of art he was himself complacently proud. It was written, as he tells us, with the express intention of proving to the world that he could produce a piece in strict accordance with the dramatic canons which he had

<sup>1</sup> To Fritz Jacobi, August 21, 1774.



flouted in *Götz von Berlichingen*.<sup>1</sup> "I challenge the most critical knife," he proudly wrote to the same correspondent, "to separate the directly translated passages from the whole without mangling it, without inflicting deadly wounds, not to say only on the narrative, but on the structure, the living organism of the piece." In *Clavigo*, at least, he has achieved what he failed to achieve in any other in the long series of his dramatic productions; it proved a successful acting play, and is still produced with acceptance at the present time. Yet from the beginning those who have admired Goethe's genius most have shaken their heads over *Clavigo*. It was to be expected that the youthful geniuses of the *Sturm und Drang* would be wrathful at the apostacy of their protagonist, who in *Götz von Berlichingen* had set at naught all the traditional rules of the drama. But more discerning critics, then and since, have expressed their dissatisfaction on other grounds. There are in *Clavigo* no elements of greatness such as appear even through the immaturities of *Götz* and *Werther*. *Clavigo* himself is so poor a creature as to leave the reader with no other feeling for him than contempt; Marie is characterless; and the other persons in the play have not sufficient scope to become well-defined figures. And the last Act, the only original addition to Beaumarchais' narrative, is in a style of cheap melodrama which, coming from the hand of Goethe, can be regarded only as a weak concession to the sentimentalism of the Darmstadt circle. "You must give us no more such stuff; others can do that," was Merck's mordant comment on *Clavigo*. Merck's opinion may have been influenced by the fact that in the cynical Carlos there are unpleasing traits of himself, but succeeding admirers of the Master have for the most part been in agreement with him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In language, as well as in form, *Clavigo* followed traditional models. Wieland was naturally gratified by Goethe's return to those models which he had set at defiance in *Götz*.

<sup>2</sup> In his Autobiography Goethe expresses the opinion that Merck's

But if *Clavigo* is not to be ranked among the greater works of Goethe, as a biographical document it is even more important than *Werther*. In the Weislingen of *Götz* he had drawn a portrait of himself, and in *Clavigo* he has drawn a similar portrait at fuller length. "I have been working at a tragedy, *Clavigo*," he wrote to a correspondent, "a modern anecdote dramatized with all possible simplicity and sincerity: my hero, an irresolute, half-great, half-little man, the pendant to Weislingen in *Götz*, or rather Weislingen himself, developed into a leading character. In it," he adds, "there are scenes which I could only indicate in *Götz* for fear of weakening the main interest." In *Clavigo* we have a fuller revelation at once of himself and of his own personal experience. He is here, in a manner, holding a dialogue with himself regarding his own character and his own past life. In the first scene of the first Act we must recognize a vivid presentment of the state of Goethe's own feelings at the crisis when he abandoned Friederike. In such a passage as the following Carlos only expresses what must then have passed through Goethe's own mind: "And to marry! to marry just when life ought to come into its first full swing; to settle down to humdrum domestic life; to limit one's being, when one has not yet done with half of one's roving; has not completed half of one's conquests!" Out of Goethe's own heart, also, must have come these words of Clavigo: "She [Marie] has vanished, clean vanished from my heart! . . . That we men are so fickle!" What was said of Werther as the counterpart of Goethe applies, of course, equally in the case of Clavigo. Goethe was not at any moment the feeble creature we have in Clavigo, yet in Clavigo's inconstancy and ambition, in his womanish susceptibility and the need of his nature for external stimulus and counsel,

advice was not sound, and that he might have done wisely in producing a succession of plays like *Clavigo*, some of which, like it, might have retained their place on the stage.

we have a portrayal of Goethe of which every trait holds true at all periods of his life. In the *Maries* of *Götz* and *Clavigo*, both betrayed by false lovers, Goethe tells us that we may find a penitent confession of his own conduct towards Friederike. But assuredly it was not with the primary intention of making this confession that either play was written. Both plays, in truth, are evidence of what is borne out in the long series of his imaginative productions from *Götz* to the Second Part of *Faust*: their conception, their informing spirit, their essential tissue come immediately from Goethe's own intellectual and emotional experience. Objective dramatic treatment of persons or events was incompatible with that passionate interest in the problems of nature and human life by which he was possessed at every stage of his development.



## CHAPTER XI

GOETHE AND SPINOZA—*DER EWIGE JUDE*

1773-4

IF we are to accept Goethe's own statement, during the years 1773-4—the distracted period, that is to say, which followed his experiences at Wetzlar, and of which *Werther* and *Clavigo* are the characteristic products—he came under the influence of a writer who transformed his conceptions, equally of the conduct of life and of man's relations to the universe—the Jewish thinker, Benedict Spinoza. The passage in which he expresses his debt to Spinoza is one of the best known in all his writings, and is, moreover, a *locus classicus* in the histories of speculative philosophy. "After looking around me in vain for a means of disciplining my peculiar nature, I at last chanced upon the *Ethica* of this man. To say exactly how much of my gain from that work was due to Spinoza, how much my own reading of him would be impossible; enough that I found in him a sedative for my passions and that he appeared to me to open up a large and free outlook on the material and moral world. But what specially attached me to him was the boundless disinterestedness which shone forth from every sentence. That marvellous saying, 'Whoso truly loves God must not desire God to love him in return,' with all the premises on which it rests and the consequences that flow from it, permeated my whole thinking. To be disinterested in everything, and most of all in love and friendship, was my highest desire, my maxim, my constant practice; so that that bold saying of mine at a later

date, 'If I love Thee, what is that to Thee?' came directly from my heart."<sup>1</sup>

What is surprising is that of this spiritual and intellectual transformation which Goethe avouches that he underwent there should be so little evidence either in his contemporary correspondence or in the conduct of his own life. In his letters of the period to which he refers he frequently names the authors with whom he happened to be engaged, but Spinoza he mentions only once, and certainly not in terms which confirm his later testimony. In a letter to a correspondent who had lent him a work of Spinoza we have these casual words: "May I keep it a little longer? I will only see how far I may follow the fellow [*Menschen*] in his subterranean borings." Whether he actually carried out his intention, or what impression the reading of the book made upon him, we are nowhere told, though, if the impression had been as profound as his Autobiography suggests, we should naturally have expected some hint of it. In his *Prometheus*, indeed, as we have seen, there are suggestions of Spinozistic pantheism, but these may easily have been derived from other sources, and, moreover, in the passage quoted, the pantheistic conceptions of Spinoza are not specifically emphasized. We know, also, that in preparing his thesis for the Doctorate of Laws he had consulted Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and the scathing criticism on the perversions of the teaching of Christ in that treatise may have suggested certain passages in a poem presently to be noted.<sup>2</sup> Yet, so far as his own contemporary testimony goes, we are

<sup>1</sup> Saying of Philine in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, bk. iv., ch. ix.

<sup>2</sup> An entry in his *Ephemerides*, the diary which he kept in his 21st year (see above, p. 74), shows that Spinoza's philosophy, as he conceived it, was then repugnant to him. The passage is as follows: "Testimonio enim mihi est virorum tantorum sententia, rectae rationi quam convenientissimum fuisse systema emanativum [he is thinking specially of Giordano Bruno]; licet nulli subscribere velim sectae, valdeque doleam Spinozismum, teterrimis erroribus ex eodem fonte manantibus, doctrinae huic purissimae iniquissimum fratrem natum esse."—Max Morris, *op. cit.* ii. 33.

led to conclude that in his retrospect he has assigned to an earlier period experiences which were of gradual growth, and which only at a later date were realized with the vividness he ascribes to them. If we turn to his actual life during the same period, it is equally hard to trace in it the results of the tranquillizing influence which he ascribes to Spinoza. As we have seen him, he was in mind distracted by uncertainty regarding the special function for which nature intended him; and in his affections the victim of emotions which by their very nature could not receive their full gratification. Nor can we say that his relations to his father, to Kestner, or Brentano were characterized by that "disinterestedness" which he claims to have attained from his study of Spinoza. As we shall presently see, Goethe was so far accurate in his retrospect that at the period before us he was already attracted by the figure of Spinoza, but it was not till many years later that a close acquaintance with Spinoza's writing resulted in that indebtedness to which he gave expression when he said that, with Linnæus and Shakespeare, the Jewish thinker was one of the great formative influences in his development.

To the same period to which Goethe assigns his transformation by Spinoza he also assigns the original conception of a work in which Spinoza was, at least, to find a place. As has been said, there are passages in such fragments of this poem as were actually written which may have been suggested by the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Spinoza, but the general tone and tendency of these fragments are equally remote from the temper and from the contemplations of the Spinoza whom the world knows. The dominant note of *Der Ewige Jude*, as the poem was to be designated, is, indeed, suggestive, not of Spinoza, but of him who may already have been in embryo in Goethe's mind—Mephistopheles. Mephistophelian is the ironical presentment in *Der Ewige Jude* of the follies, the delusions of man in his highest aspirations.



Near the close of his life it was said of Goethe that the world would come to believe that there had been not one but many Goethes,<sup>1</sup> and the contrast between the author of *Werther* and the author of *Der Ewige Jude* is an interesting commentary on the remark. Yet the subject of the abortive poem, as we have it—the perversions of Christianity in its historical development—was not a new interest for him. During his illness after his return from Leipzig he had, as we saw, assiduously read Arnold's *History of Heretics*,<sup>2</sup> with the result that he excogitated a religious system for himself. His two contributions to the short-lived Review also show that religion, doctrinal and historical, was still a living interest for him. Moreover, as was usually the case with all his creative efforts, there were external promptings to his choice of the subject which is the main theme of the fragments in question. The religious world of Germany at this period was distracted by the controversies of warring theologians. There were the rationalists, who would bring all religion, natural and revealed, to the bar of human reason; there were the dogmatists, who thought religion could never rest on a secure foundation except it were embodied in an array of definite formulas; and, lastly, there were the pietists, or mystics, for whom religion was a matter of pious feeling independent of all dogma. In the spectacle of these Christians reprobating each others' creeds Goethe saw a theme for a moral satire which, fragment as it is, takes its place with the most powerful efforts of his genius.

Yet, as originally conceived, *Der Ewige Jude* was apparently to have been worked out along other lines. What this original conception was, Goethe tells in some detail in his Autobiography; and, as it is there expounded, we see the scope of a poem which, if the power apparent in the existing fragments had gone to the making of it, would have taken its place with *Faust* among the great

<sup>1</sup> By Felix Mendelssohn.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 47.

imaginative works of human genius. The theme of the poem was to be the Wandering Jew, with whose legend Goethe was familiar from chap-books he had read in childhood. The poem was to open with an account of the circumstances in which the curse of Cain was incurred by Ahasuerus, the name assigned in the legend to the Wandering Jew. Ahasuerus was to be represented as a shoemaker of the type of Hans Sachs—a kind of Jewish Socrates who freely plied his wit in putting searching questions to the casual passers-by. Recognized as an original, persons of all ranks and opinions, even the Sadducees and Pharisees, would stop by the way and engage in talk with him. He was to be specially interested in Jesus, with whom he was to hold frequent conversations, but whose idealism his matter-of-fact nature was to be incapable of understanding. When, in the teeth of his protestations, Jesus pursued His mission and was finally condemned to death, Ahasuerus would only have hard words for His folly. Judas was then to be represented as entering the workshop and explaining that his act of treachery had been intended to force Jesus to become the national deliverer and declare Himself king, but Judas receives no comfort from Ahasuerus, and straightway takes his own life. Then was to follow the scene retailed in the legend—Jesus fainting at Ahasuerus's door on His way to death; Simon the Cyrenian relieving Him of the burden of the cross; the reproaches of Ahasuerus addressed to the Saviour for neglecting his counsel; the transfigured features on the handkerchief of St. Veronica; and the words of the Lord dooming His stiff-necked gainsayer to wander to and fro on earth till His second coming. As the subsequent narrative was to be developed, it was to illustrate the outstanding events in the history of Christianity—one incident in the experience of the Wanderer marked for treatment being an interview with Spinoza.

In concluding the sketch of the poem as he originally conceived it, Goethe remarks that he

found he had neither the knowledge nor the concentration of purpose necessary for its adequate treatment; and in point of fact, in the fragment as it exists there is little suggestion of the original conception. The title which Goethe himself gave it at a later date, *Gedicht der Ankunft des Herrn*, more fitly describes it than the title *Der Ewige Jude*. Of the two main sections into which the poem is divided, the first, extending to over seventy lines, corresponds most closely to the original conception. In twenty introductory lines the poet describes how the inspiration to sing the wondrous experiences of the much-travelled man had come to him. The note struck in these lines is maintained throughout the remainder of the fragment. It is a note of ironic persiflage which is plainly indicated to the reader. In lack of a better Pegasus, a broomstick will serve the poet's purpose, and the reader is invited to take or leave the gibberish as he pleases. Then follows a description of the shoemaker, who is represented as half Essene, half Methodist or Moravian, but still more of a Separatist—certainly not the type originally conceived by Goethe as that of the Wandering Jew. The shoemaker is, in fact, a sectary of Goethe's own time, discontented with the religious world around him, and convinced that salvation is only to be found in his own petty sect. Equally as a picture of historical Christianity in all ages is meant the satirical presentment of the religious condition of Judæa—of indolent and luxurious church dignitaries, fanatics looking for signs and wonders, denouncing the sins of their generation, and giving themselves up to the antics of the spirit.

But it is in the last and longest figment of the poem that its real power and interest are to be found. Its theme is the Second Coming of Christ and His experiences in lands professing His religion. In a scene, compared with which the Prologue in Heaven of *Faust* is decorous, God the Father ironically suggests that the Son would find scope



for His friendly feeling to the human race if He were to pay a visit to the earth. Alighting on the mountain where Satan had tempted Him, the Son, filled with tender yearning for the race for whom He had died, has already anxious forebodings of woe on earth. In a soliloquy, which we may take as the expression of Goethe's own deepest feelings, as it is the expression of his finest poetic gift, He gives utterance to His boundless love for man, and His compassion for a world where truth and error, happiness and misery, are inextricably linked. Continuing His descent, He first visits the Catholic countries where He finds that in the multitude of crosses Christ and the Cross are forgotten. Passing into a land where Protestantism is the professed religion, He sees a similar state of things. He meets by the way a country parson who has a fat wife and many children, and "does not disturb himself about God in Heaven." Next He requests to be conducted to the Oberpfarrer of the neighbourhood, in whom He might expect to find "a man of God," and the fragment ends with an account of His interview with the Oberpfarrer's cook, Hogarthian in its broad humour, but disquieting even to the reader who may hold with Jean Paul that the test of one's faith is the capacity to laugh at its object.

Goethe forbade the publication of *Der Ewige Jude*, and we can understand his reason for the prohibition.<sup>1</sup> To many persons for whose religious feelings he had a genuine respect—to his mother among others—the poem would have been a cause of offence of which Goethe was not the man to be guilty. Moreover, a continuous work in such a vein was alien to Goethe's own genius. As we have them, the fragments are but another specimen of that "godlike insolence" which, in his later years, he found in his satires on Herder, Wieland, and others.

<sup>1</sup> It was first published in 1836, four years after his death.

## CHAPTER XII

### GOETHE IN SOCIETY

1774

THE publication of *Götz von Berlichingen* in the spring of 1773, we have seen, had made Goethe known to the literary world of Germany, and a figure of prime interest to its leading representatives. Hitherto, nevertheless, with the exception of Herder, he had come into personal contact with no men of outstanding note who might hold intercourse with him on anything like equal terms. In the summer of 1774, however, when *Clavigo* and *Werther* were on the eve of publication, he was brought into contact with three men, all of whom had already achieved reputation in their respective spheres; and all of whom had visions as distinct from each other as they were distinct from Goethe's own. As it happens, we have records of their intercourse from the hands of three of the four, and, taken together, they present a picture of the youthful Goethe which leaves little to be desired in its fidelity, in its definiteness, in its vividness of colour. During the greater part of two months (from the last week in June till the middle of August) he comes before us in all the splendour of his youthful genius, with all his wild humours, his audacities, his overflowing vitality.

The first of these three notabilities who came in Goethe's way was one of whom he himself said, "that the world had never seen his like, and will not see his like again." He was Johann Kaspar

Lavater, born in Zurich in 1741, and thus eight years older than Goethe. Lavater had early drawn the attention of the world to himself. In his sixteenth year he had published a volume of poems (*Schweizerlieder*) which attained a wide circulation, and a later work (*Aussichten in die Ewigkeit*) found such acceptance from its vein of mystical piety that he was hailed as a religious teacher who had given a new savour to the Christian life. At the time when he crossed Goethe's path he was engaged on the work on Physiognomy with which his name is chiefly associated, and it was partly with the object of collecting the materials for that work that he was now visiting Germany. But the personality of Lavater was more remarkable than his writings. By his combination of the saint and the man of the world he made a unique impression on all who met him, on Goethe notably among others. That his religious feelings were sincere his lifelong preoccupation with the character of Christ as the great exemplar of humanity may be taken as sufficient proof. To impress the world with the conception he had formed of the person of Christ was the mission of his life, and it was in the carrying out of this mission that his remarkable characteristics came into play. With a face and expression which suggested the Apostle John, he exhibited in society a tact and address which, at this period at least, did not compromise his religious professions. Next to his interest in the Founder of Christianity was his interest in human character, and his divination of the working of men's minds was such that, according to Goethe, it produced an uneasy feeling to be in his presence. Be it added that Lavater was in full sympathy with the leaders of the *Sturm und Drang* as emancipators from dead formalism, and the champions of natural feeling as opposed to cold intelligence. Such was the remarkable person with whom Goethe was thrown into contact during a few notable weeks, and who has recorded his impressions of him with



the insight of a discerner of spirits. As time was to show, they were divided in their essential modes of thought and feeling by as wide a gulf as can separate man from man, and in later years Lavater's compromises with the world in the prosecution of his mission drew from Goethe more stinging comments than he has used in the case of almost any other person.<sup>1</sup> In the passages of his Autobiography, where he records his first intercourse with Lavater, though his tone is distinctly critical, of bitterness there is no trace, and there is the frankest testimony to Lavater's personal fascination and the stimulating interest of his mind and character.

Relations between the two had begun a year before their actual meeting. Lavater had read Goethe's *Letter of the Pastor*, and his interest in its general line of thought led him to open a correspondence with its author. The reading of *Götz*, a copy of which Goethe sent to him, convinced him that a portent had appeared in the literary world. "I rejoice with trembling," he wrote to Herder; "among all writers I know no greater genius." Before they met, indeed, Lavater was already dominated by a force that brought home to him a sense of his own weakness to which he gave artless expression. In some lines he addressed to Goethe he takes the tone of a humble disciple, and prays that out of his fulness he would communicate ardour to his feelings and light to his intelligence. Yet in Lavater's eyes Goethe was a brand to be plucked from the burning, and, born proselytizer as he was, he even made the attempt to convert Goethe to his own views of ultimate salvation. In response to his appeal Goethe wrote a letter which should have convinced Lavater that he was dealing with a son of Adam with the ineradicable instincts of the natural

<sup>1</sup> In one of his *Xenien* Goethe speaks thus of Lavater:—

"Schade, dass die Natur nur einen Menschen aus dir schuf,  
Denn zum würdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff."

man.<sup>1</sup> "Thank you, dear brother," he wrote, "for your ardour regarding your brother's eternal happiness. Believe me, the time will come when we shall understand each other. You hold converse with me as with an unbeliever—one who insists on understanding, on having proofs, who has not been schooled by experience. And the contrary of all this is my real feeling. . . . Am I not more resigned in the matter of understanding and proving than yourself? . . . Perhaps I am foolish in not giving you the pleasure of expressing myself in your language, and in not showing to you by laying bare my deepest experiences that I am a man and therefore cannot feel otherwise than other men, and that all the apparent contradiction between us is only strife of words which arises from the fact that I realize things under other combinations than you, and that in expressing their relativity I must call them by other names; and this has from the beginning been the source of all controversies, and will be to the end. And you will be for ever plaguing me with evidences! And to what end? Do I require evidence that I exist? evidence that I feel? I treasure, cherish, and revere only such evidences as prove to me that thousands, or even one, have felt that which strengthens and consoles me. And, therefore, the word of man is for me the word of God, whether parsons or prostitutes have brought it together and enrolled it in the canon, or flung it as fragments to the winds. And with my innermost soul I fall on the neck of brother Moses! Prophet! Evangelist! Apostle, Spinoza or Machiavelli. But to each I am permitted to say: "Dear friend, it is with you as it is with me; in the particular you feel yourself grand and mighty, but the whole went as little into your head as into mine."

On June 23, Lavater arrived in Frankfort, where during four days he was entertained as a guest in the

<sup>1</sup> The letter is addressed to Heinrich Pfenninger, an engraver in Zurich, who engraved some of the plates in Lavater's book on Physiognomy. The date is April 26, 1774.

Goethe household. The news of his coming had created a lively interest in all sections of the community, and during his stay he was besieged by admiring crowds, especially of women, who insisted even on seeing the bedchamber where the prophet slept. "The pious souls," was Merck's sardonic comment, "wished to see where they had laid the Lord"; but even Merck came under the prophet's spell. The meeting of Lavater and Goethe was characteristic of the time. "*Bist's?*" was Lavater's first exclamation. "*Ich bin's,*" was the reply; and they fell upon each other's necks. On Lavater's indicating "by some singular exclamations" that Goethe was not exactly what he expected, Goethe replied in the tone of banter which he maintained throughout their personal intercourse, that he was as God and nature had made him, and they must be content with their work. "All spirit (*Geist*) and truth,"<sup>1</sup> is Lavater's comment on Goethe's conversation at the close of their first day's meeting.

The following days were taken up with excursions and social gatherings in which Lavater was the central figure, entrancing his hearers by his social graces and his apostolic unction. In the Fräulein von Klettenberg he found a kindred soul, and Goethe listened, as he tells us, with profit as they discoursed on the high themes in which they had a common interest. If he derived profit, it was not of a nature that Lavater and the Fräulein would have desired. With the religious opinions of neither was he in sympathy, and when they rejected his own, he says, he would badger them with paradoxes and exaggerations, and, if they became impatient, would leave them with a jest. What is noteworthy in Lavater's record, indeed, is Goethe's communicativeness and spontaneity in all that concerned himself. "So soon as we enter society," is one of his remarks recorded by Lavater, "we take the key out of our hearts and

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 33.



put it in our pockets. Those who allow it to remain there are blockheads.”<sup>1</sup>

During his stay in Frankfort Lavater was so constantly surrounded by his admirers that Goethe saw comparatively little of him. On June 28 Lavater left for Ems, and it is a testimony to their mutual attraction that Goethe accompanied him. The day's journey seems to have left an abiding impression on Goethe's memory, as he makes special reference to it in his record of Lavater's visit; and, as it happens, Lavater noted in his Diary the principal topics of their conversation. Travelling in a private carriage during the long summer day, they had an opportunity for abundant talk such as did not occur again. One theme on which Goethe spoke with enthusiasm, it is interesting to note, was Spinoza and his writings, but, as his talk is reported by Lavater, there was no hint in it of the profound change which the study of Spinoza had effected in him. It was to the man and not to the thinker that he paid his reverential tribute—to the purity, simplicity, and high wisdom of his life. But Goethe's own literary preoccupations appear to have been the chief subject of their talk. He spoke of a play on Julius Cæsar on which he was engaged, and which remained one of his many abortive ambitions; he read passages from *Der Ewige Jude*, “a singular thing in doggerel verse,” Lavater calls it; recited a romance translated from the Scots dialect; and narrated for Lavater's benefit the whole story of the *Iliad*, reading passages of the poem from a Latin translation. The memorable day was not to be repeated. At Ems, as at Frankfort, Lavater was taken possession of by a throng of worshippers, and the state of his own affairs at home afforded Goethe an excuse for leaving him.

By a curious coincidence, shortly after Goethe's return, there arrived another prophet in Frankfort—also, like Lavater, out on a mission of his own. This was Johann Bernhard Basedow, whose character and

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 34.

career had made him one of the remarkable figures of his time in Germany. Born in Hamburg in 1723, the son of a peruke-maker there, in conduct and opinions he had been at odds with society from the beginning. In middle age he had come under the influence of Rousseau, and thenceforth he made it his mission by word and deed to realize Rousseau's ideals in education. He had expounded his theories in voluminous publications which had attracted wide attention, and the object of his present travels was to collect funds to establish a school at Dessau in which his educational views should be carried into effect.<sup>1</sup> Goethe, as he himself tells us, had as little sympathy with the gospel of Basedow as with that of Lavater, but, always attracted to originals, Basedow's personality amused and interested him. What gave point to his curiosity was the piquancy of the contrast between the two prophets. Lavater was all grace, purity, and refinement; "in his presence one shrank like a maiden from hurting his feelings." In appearance, voice, manner, on the other hand, Basedow was the incarnation of a hectoring bully, as regardless of others' feelings as he was impermeable in his own. His personal habits, also, were a further trial, as he drank more than was good for him and lived in an atmosphere of vile tobacco smoke. Such was the singular mortal whose society Goethe deliberately sought and cultivated during the next few weeks as opportunity offered.

After spending some days in Frankfort, Basedow, on July 12, set out to join Lavater at Ems, whether at Goethe's suggestion or of his own accord we are not told. Goethe had seen enough of Basedow to make him wish to see more of him, and, moreover, it would be a piquant experience to see the two incongruous apostles together. "Such a splendid opportunity, if not of enlightenment, at least of

<sup>1</sup> The school was actually founded in 1774, but subsequently, owing to quarrels with his colleagues, Basedow had to leave it. It was closed in 1793.

mental discipline," he says, "I could not, in short, let slip." Accordingly, leaving some pressing business in the hands of his father and friends, he followed Basedow to Ems on July 15. Ems then, as now, was a gay watering-place crowded with guests of all conditions, and therefore an excellent field for the two proselytizers. Goethe did not spend his days in the company of the two lights; while they were plying their mission, he threw himself into the distractions of the town, as usual making himself a conspicuous figure by his overflowing spirits and his practical jokes. Only at night, when he did not happen to have a dancing partner, did he snatch a moment to pay a visit to Basedow, whom he found in a close, unventilated room, enveloped in tobacco smoke, and dictating endlessly to his secretary from his couch; for it was one of Basedow's peculiarities that he never went to bed. On one occasion Goethe had an excellent opportunity of observing the contrasted characters of the two prophets. The three had gone to Nassau to visit the Frau von Stein, mother of the statesman, and a numerous company had been brought together to meet them. All three had the opportunity of displaying their special gifts—Lavater his skill in physiognomy, Goethe the gift he had inherited from his mother of story-telling to children; but in the end Basedow asserted himself in his most characteristic style. With a power of reasoning and a passionate eloquence, to which both Goethe and Lavater bear witness, he proclaimed the conditions of the regeneration of society—the improved education of youth and the necessity for the rich to open their purses for its accomplishment. Then, his wanton spirit as usual getting the better of him, he turned the torrent of his eloquence in another direction. A thorough-going rationalist, his pet aversion was the dogma of the Trinity, and on that dogma he now directed his batteries, with the effect of horrifying his audience, most of whom had come to be edified by the pious exhortations of



Lavater. Lavater mildly expostulated; Goethe endeavoured by jesting interruptions to change the subject, and the ladies to break up the company. All their efforts were in vain, and the apostle of Rousseau had the satisfaction of completely unbosoming himself and at the same time forfeiting some contributions to his educational scheme. As they drove back to Ems, Goethe took a humorous revenge. The heat of a July day and his recent vocal exertions had made the prophet thirsty, and as they passed a tavern he ordered the driver to pull up. Goethe imperiously countermanded the order, to the wrath of Basedow, which Goethe turned aside, however, with one of his ever-ready quips.

The strangely-assorted trio were not yet tired of each other's company, for, when on July 18 Lavater left Ems, both Goethe and Basedow accompanied him. Their way lay down the Lahn and the Rhine, and on the voyage Basedow and Goethe conducted themselves like German students on holiday—the former discoursing on grammar and smoking everlastingly, the latter improvising doggerel verses and the beautiful lines beginning: *Hoch auf dem alten Turme steht*. On landing at Coblenz the behaviour of the pair was so outrageous that all three were apparently taken by the crowd for lunatics. At Coblenz they dined, and the dinner has its place in literature, for both in his Autobiography and in some sarcastic lines (*Diné zu Coblenz*) Goethe has commemorated it. He sat between Lavater and Basedow, and during the meal the former expounded the Revelation of St. John to a country pastor, and the latter exerted himself to prove to a stolid dancing-master that baptism was an anachronism.

On the 20th they continued their voyage down the Rhine as far as Bonn, Goethe still in the same madcap humour. Lavater gives us a picture of him at one moment on the voyage—with gray hat, adorned with a bunch of flowers, with a brown silk necktie and gray collar, gnawing a *Butterbrot* like a

wolf. From Bonn they drove to Cologne, Goethe on the way inscribing in an album the concluding lines of the *Diné zu Coblenz* :—

Und, wie nach Emaus, weiter ging's  
Mit Geist-und Feuerschritten,  
Prophete rechts, Prophete links,  
Das Weltkind in der Mitten.

At Cologne they parted for the day, Lavater proceeding to Mülheim<sup>1</sup> and Goethe to Düsseldorf. On the 21st Goethe was at Elberfeld, where his former friend Jung Stilling was settled as a physician. Stilling has related how Goethe made him aware of his presence. A message came to him that a stranger, who had been taken ill at an inn, wished to see him. He found the stranger in bed with head covered, and when at his request he leant over to feel his pulse, the patient flung his arms round his neck. On the evening of the same day there was a social gathering at the house of a pious merchant in the town in honour of Lavater, who had come to Elberfeld and was the merchant's guest. As described by Stilling, the guests, chiefly consisting of persons of the pietist persuasion, were as remarkable for their appearance as for their opinions, and the artist who accompanied Lavater in his travels busily sketched their heads throughout the evening. Goethe was in his wildest mood, dancing round the table in a manner familiar to those who knew him, but which led the strangers present to doubt his sanity. It was apparently during the same evening that there occurred an incident which, as recorded by Lavater, shows us another side of Goethe. Among the guests was one Hasenkamp, a pietistic illuminist, who suddenly, when the company was in the full flow of amicable conversation, turned to Goethe and asked him if he were the Herr Goethe, the author of *Werther*. "Yes," was the answer. "Then I feel bound in my conscience to express to you my abhorrence of that infamous book. Be it God's will

<sup>1</sup> Basedow remained for a time at Mülheim. As we shall see, he and Goethe met again later in the month.

to amend your perverted heart!" The company did not know what to expect next, when Goethe quietly replied: "I quite understand that from your point of view you could not judge otherwise, and I honour you for your candour in thus taking me to task. Pray for me!"<sup>1</sup>

Among the guests who were present at the same motley gathering was the third distinguished personage whose acquaintance Goethe made during these memorable weeks. This was Fritz Jacobi, one of the interesting figures in the history of German thought, alike by his personal character and the nature of his speculations. Goethe and he had common friends before they met, but their relations had been such as to make their meeting a matter of some delicacy. Goethe had satirized the poetry of Jacobi's brother Georg, and in his correspondence even vehemently expressed his dislike to the characters of both brothers as he had been led to conceive them. Three women—Sophie von la Roche, Johanna Fahlmer, the aunt of the Jacobis, and Betty Jacobi, their sister, all of whom Goethe counted among his friends—had endeavoured to effect a reconciliation between Goethe and the two brothers, but eventually it was Goethe's own impulsive good nature that led to their meeting. The Jacobis lived in Düsseldorf, and the morning after his arrival in the town he called at their house, but found that Fritz had gone to Pempelfort, a place in the neighbourhood where he had an estate. Goethe at once set out for Pempelfort, and in a letter to the wife of Fritz he characteristically describes the circumstances of the meeting. "It was glorious that you did not happen to be in Düsseldorf and that I did what my simple heart prompted me. Without introduction, without being marshalled in, without excuses, just dropping straight from heaven before Fritz Jacobi! And he and I, and I and he! And, before a sisterly

<sup>1</sup> As *Werther* was not published till the autumn of 1774, there must be some confusion in Lavater's narrative.



look had done the preliminaries, we were already what we were bound to be and could be.”<sup>1</sup>

Fritz Jacobi possessed a combination of qualities that were peculiarly fitted to impress Goethe at the period when they met. Handsome in person, and with the polished manners of a man of the world, he conjoined a practical talent for business with a passionate interest in all questions touching human destiny. About six years Goethe's senior, he was, on Goethe's own testimony, far ahead of him in the domain of philosophical thought. After Herder, Jacobi was indeed the most stimulating personality Goethe had met. While his intercourse with Lavater and Basedow had been only a source of entertainment, from Jacobi he received a stimulus which opened up new depths of thought and feeling.

Both Goethe and Jacobi have left records of their intercourse, and both are equally enthusiastic regarding the profit they derived from it. From the first moment of their meeting there was a spontaneous interchange of their deepest thoughts and feelings, unique in the experience of both. In Jacobi's company Goethe became another man from what he had been in the company of Lavater and Basedow. "I was weary," he says, "of my previous follies and wantonness, which, in truth, only concealed my dissatisfaction that this journey had brought so little profit to my mind and heart. Now, therefore, my deepest feelings broke forth with irrepressible force." After a few days spent at Pempelfort, during which Georg Jacobi joined them, the two brothers accompanied Goethe to Cologne on his homeward journey. It was during the hours they were together at Cologne that the conversation of Fritz and Goethe became most intimate, and these hours remained a moving memory with both, even when in after years divided aims and interests had estranged them. A visit to the cathedral of Cologne recalled Goethe's enthusiasm for the cathedral of Strassburg, but its

<sup>1</sup> End of July, 1774.

unfinished condition depressed him with the sense of a great idea unrealized, for in his own words "an unfinished work is like one destroyed." The emotions evoked by another spectacle in Cologne, according to Goethe's own testimony, had the instantaneous effect of his gaining for life the confidence of both Jacobis. The sight which equally moved all three was the unchanged interior of the mansion of a citizen of Cologne named Jabach, who a century before had been distinguished as an amateur of the fine arts. But what specially impressed them was a picture by Le Brun representing Jabach and his family in all the freshness of life, and the consequent reflection that this picture was the sole memorial that they had ever lived. "This reflection," Georg Jacobi comments, "made a profound impression on our stranger,"<sup>1</sup> and the impression must have been abiding, since in no passage of his Autobiography does he recall more vividly the emotions of a vanished time.

The evening of the day they spent in Cologne is noted by both Goethe and Fritz Jacobi as marking a point in their intellectual development. The inn in which they were quartered overlooked the Rhine, the murmur of whose moonlit waters was attuned to the sentiments that had been evoked in the course of the day. In the prospect of their near parting all three were disposed to confidential self-revelations, and the conversation ran on themes regarding which they had all thought and felt much—on poetry, religion, and philosophy. As usual with him when he was in congenial company, Goethe freely declaimed such pieces of verse as happened at the time to be interesting him—the verses on this occasion being Scottish ballads and two poems of his own, *Der König von Thule*, and *Der untreue Knabe*. In philosophy the talk turned mainly on Spinoza, of whom Goethe spoke "unforgettably."<sup>2</sup> "What hours! what days,"

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op cit.* i. 45.

<sup>2</sup> As Goethe at this time knew little of Spinoza's philosophy, it was probably on Spinoza's personal character that he enlarged. On this theme, we have seen, he had discoursed with Lavater.

wrote Fritz immediately after their parting, "thou soughtest me about midnight in the darkness; it was as if a new soul were born within me. From that moment I could not let thee go."<sup>1</sup> Neither, in the ecstasy of these moments, dreamt that at a later day Spinoza, who was now their strongest bond of union, was to be the main cause of their estrangement. For Jacobi, Spinoza became the "atheist," to be reprobated as one of the world's false prophets; while for Goethe he remained to the end the man to whom God had been nearest and to whom He had been most fully revealed.

Shortly after parting with Goethe, Fritz Jacobi communicated his impression of him to Wieland in the following words: "The more I think of it, the more intensely I realize the impossibility of conveying to one who has not seen or heard Goethe any intelligible notion of this extraordinary creation of God. As Heinse<sup>2</sup> expressed it, 'Goethe is a genius from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot,' one possessed, I may add, for whom it is impossible to act from mere caprice. One has only to be with him for an hour to feel the utter absurdity of desiring him to think and act otherwise than he thinks and acts. By this I don't mean to suggest that he cannot grow in beauty and goodness, but that in his case such growth must be that of the unfolding flower, of the ripening seed, of the tree soaring aloft and crowning itself with foliage."<sup>3</sup>

On leaving the Jacobis Goethe proceeded to Ems, where he again met Lavater and Basedow. On the following day Lavater went home, but Goethe and Basedow remained till the second week of August. On the 13th Goethe was in his father's house, and in a state of exaltation after his late experiences, to which he gives lively expression in a letter to Fritz

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Johann J. W. Heinse, a minor poet of the time, and one of Goethe's most fervent admirers.

<sup>3</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 45-6.



Jacobi. "I dream of the moment, dear Fritz, I have your letter and hover around you. You have felt what a rapture it is to me to be the object of your love. Oh! the joy of believing that one receives more from others than one gives. Oh, Love, Love! The poverty of riches—and what strength is lent me when I embrace in another all that I lack myself, and yet give to him what I have. . . . Believe me, we might henceforth be dumb to each other, and, meeting again after many a day, we should feel as if we had all along been walking hand in hand."<sup>1</sup>

In the first weeks of October Goethe made personal acquaintance with a more distinguished personage than either Lavater or Basedow or Jacobi—"the patriarch of German poetry," Klopstock, the author of the *Messias*.<sup>2</sup> Since his childhood, the name of Klopstock had been familiar to Goethe. To his conservative father, the *Messias*, as written in unrhymed verse, was a monstrosity in German literature, and he refused to give it a place in his library. Surreptitiously introduced into the house, however, Goethe had read it with enthusiasm and committed its most striking passages to memory. And he had retained his admiration throughout all the successive changes in his own literary ideals. Like all the youth of his generation, he saw in Klopstock a great original genius to whom German poetry owed emancipation from conventional forms and new elements of thought, feeling, and imagination. Klopstock, on his part, had been interested in the rising genius whose *Götz von Berlichingen* had taken the world by storm, and had signified through a common friend that he would be gratified to see other works from his hand. Goethe had responded in the spirit of a youthful adorer, conscious of the honour which the request implied. "And why should I not write to Klopstock," he wrote, "and send him anything of mine, anything in which

<sup>1</sup> August 13-14, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Klopstock came from Göttingen, where he was the idol of a band of youthful poets.

he can take an interest? May I not address the living, to whose grave I would make a pilgrimage?"<sup>1</sup>

These communications took place in May, and in the beginning of October Goethe received an invitation from Klopstock to meet him at Friedberg. Owing to some delay on his journey, however, Klopstock did not appear at the time appointed, but, gratified by Goethe's eagerness to meet him, he shortly afterwards came to Frankfort, and was for a few days a guest in the Goethe household. From Goethe's account of their intercourse we gather that their intercourse was not wholly satisfactory to either. Klopstock was in his fiftieth year, and his somewhat self-conscious and pedantic manner did not encourage effusion.<sup>2</sup> Like certain other poets he affected the tone of a man of the world and deliberately avoided topics relative to his own art. The two themes on which he expanded were riding and skating—of which latter pastime he had indeed made himself the laureate. Goethe himself was passionately fond of both exercises, but from "the patriarch of German poetry" he might have expected discourse on higher themes. Apparently, however, their relations remained sufficiently cordial, as, when Klopstock took his departure, Goethe accompanied him to Mannheim. On his way home in the post-carriage Goethe gave utterance to his feelings in some rhapsodical lines—*An Schwager Kronos*—(To Time the Postillion)—which may be regarded as a commentary on his impressions of the great man. Written in the unrhymed, irregular measure which Klopstock had been the first to employ, and containing phrases directly borrowed from Klopstock, they give passionate expression to his desire for a life, brief it might be, but a life alive to the end with the zest of living. It was the sentiment of the youth of the *Sturm und Drang*, which the chilling impression he had received from Klopstock doubtless evoked with rebounding

<sup>1</sup> May 28, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Merck found in Klopstock "viel Weltkunde und Weltkälte."

force during his solitary drive home in the post-carriage.<sup>1</sup>

In the same month of October Goethe had other visitors less distinguished, youths of his own age, who came to pay homage to him as their acknowledged leader in the literary revolution of which *Goetz* had been the manifesto. We have seen the impressions Goethe made upon his seniors like Lavater and Fritz Jacobi; how he struck his more youthful acquaintances is recorded by two of them—both poets of some promise who had attracted attention by their contempt of conventionalities. It will be seen that their language shows that Goethe's own exuberant style in his correspondence of the period was not peculiar to himself. The first to come was H. C. Boie, an ardent worshipper of Klopstock, and one of the heroes of the *Sturm und Drang*. "I have had a superlative, delightful day," Boie records, "a whole day spent alone and uninterrupted with Goethe—Goethe whose heart is as great and noble as his mind! The day passes my description." The other visitor, F. A. Werthes, who comprehensively worshipped both Klopstock and Wieland, leaves Boie behind in the exuberance of his impressions. "This Goethe," he wrote to Fritz Jacobi, "of whom from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof and from the going down thereof to its rising I should like to speak and stammer and rhapsodize with you . . . this Goethe has, as it were, transcended all the ideals I had ever conceived of the direct feeling and observation of a great genius. Never could I have so well explained and sympathized with the feelings of the disciples on the way to Emmaus when they said: 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way?' Let us make of him our Lord Christ for evermore, and let me be the least of his disciples. He has spoken so much and

<sup>1</sup> Writing to Sophie von la Roche on November 20, 1774, Goethe calls Klopstock "a noble, great man, on whom the peace of God résts."



so excellently with me; words of eternal life which, so long as I live, shall be my articles of faith."<sup>1</sup> Apart from its relation to Goethe, it will be seen that Werthes' letter is a document of the time, bringing before us the strained and distorted sentiment which was sufficiently apparent in Goethe himself, but which he, almost alone of the youths of his generation, was strong enough to hold in check.

In the following month (December) Goethe received still another visit—a visit which was to lead directly to the most decisive event in his life. As he was sitting one evening in his own room, a stranger was ushered in, whom in the dusk he mistook for Fritz Jacobi. The stranger was Major von Knebel, who had served in the Prussian army, but was now on a tour with the young princes of Weimar, Carl August and Constantin, to the latter of whom he was acting as tutor. Knebel was keenly interested in literature, was a poet himself, and an ardent admirer of Goethe. There followed congenial talk which was to be the beginning of a friendship that, unlike most of Goethe's youthful friendships, was to endure into the old age of both. But Knebel had come on a special errand; the young princes had expressed the desire to become acquainted with the man who had made merry with their instructor Wieland, and whose name was in all men's mouths as the author of the recently published *Werther*. Nothing loth, Goethe accompanied Knebel to the princes, and in the interviews that followed he displayed all the tact that characterized his subsequent intercourse with the great. Studiously avoiding any reference to his own productions, he turned the conversation to subjects of public interest, on which he spoke with a fulness of knowledge that convinced his hearers that the author of *Werther* was not an effeminate sentimentalist. So favourable was the impression he made on the princes that they expressed a wish that he would follow them to Mainz

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 46.

and spend a few days with them there. The proposal was highly acceptable to Goethe, but there was a difficulty in the way. The Herr Rath was a sturdy republican, and had an ingrained aversion to the nobility as a class. In his opinion, for a commoner to seek intercourse with that class was to compromise his self-respect and to invite humiliation, and he roundly maintained that in seeking his son's acquaintance the princes were only laying a train to pay him back for his treatment of Wieland. When the Goethe household were divided on important questions, it was their custom to refer to the Fräulein von Klettenberg as arbiter. That sainted lady was now on a sick-bed, but through the Frau Rath she conveyed her opinion that the invitation of the princes should be accepted. To Mainz, therefore, Goethe went in company with Knebel, who had remained behind to see more of him, and his second meeting with the two boys completed his conquest of them. Any resentment they may have entertained for his attack on Wieland was removed by his explanation of its origin, and it was with mutual attraction that both parties separated after a few days' cordial intercourse. Thus were established the relations which within a year were to result in Goethe's departure from "accursed Frankfort," and his permanent settlement at the Court of Weimar.

As it happens, we have a record of Knebel's impression of Goethe during their few days' intercourse, which as a characterization comes next in interest to that of Kestner already quoted. "From Wieland," he writes, "you will have been able to learn that I have made the acquaintance of Goethe, and that I think somewhat enthusiastically of him. I cannot help myself, but I swear to you that all of you, all who have heads and hearts, would think of him as I do if you came to know him. He will always remain to me one of the most extraordinary apparitions of my life. Perhaps the novelty of the impression has struck me overmuch, but how can I

help it if natural causes produce natural workings in me? . . . Goethe lives in a state of constant inward war and tumult, since on every subject he feels with the extreme of vehemence. It is a need of his spirit to make enemies with whom he can contend; moreover, it is not the most contemptible adversaries he will single out. He has spoken to me of all those whom he has attacked with special and genuinely felt esteem. But the fellow delights in battle; he has the spirit of an athlete. As he is probably the most singular being who ever existed, he began as follows one evening in Mainz in quite melancholy tones: 'I am now good friends again with everybody—with the Jacobis, with Wieland; and this is not as it should be with me. It is the condition of my being that, as I must have something which for the time being is for me the ideal of the excellent, so also I must have an ideal against which I can direct my wrath.'<sup>1</sup>

On Goethe's return to Frankfort sad news awaited him; during his absence the Fräulein von Klettenberg, whom he had left on her sick-bed, had died. It was the severest personal loss he had yet sustained by death. After his sister she had been the chief confidant of all his troubles, his hopes, and ambitions, and he never left her presence without feeling that for the time he had been lifted out of himself. The relations between Goethe and her, indeed, show him in his most attractive light. He had never disguised from her the fact that he could not share the faith by which she lived; he was, as we have seen, even in the habit of jesting at her most cherished beliefs; but there was never a shade of alienation between them. "Bid him adieu," was her last message to him through his mother; "I have held him very dear."<sup>2</sup> Take it as we may, it is the singular fact that by none was Goethe regarded with more affectionate esteem than by the two pious mystics, Jung Stilling and Fräulein von Klettenberg.

<sup>1</sup> Max Morris, *op. cit.* iv. 370-1. About the same date as Knebel's letter, Goethe wrote to Sophie von la Roche: "Das ist was Verfluchtes dass ich anfangs mich mit niemand mehr misszuverstehen." In his 49th year Goethe said of himself: "Opposition ist mir immer nötig."

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 370.



## CHAPTER XIII

LILI SCHÖNEMANN

1775

To the year 1775 belongs the third critical period of Goethe's last years in Frankfort. The autumn of 1771 following his return from Strassburg had been the first of these periods, and was signalized by *Götz von Berlichingen*, the product of his contrition for Friederike and of the inspiration of Shakespeare. In the summer and autumn of 1772 came the Wetzlar episode, which found expression in *Werther*; and in the opening weeks of 1775 begins the third period of crisis, the issue of which was to be his final leave-taking of Frankfort.

On an evening near the close of 1774 or at the beginning of 1775, a friend introduced Goethe to a house in Frankfort which during the next nine months was to be the centre of his thoughts and emotions. There was a crowd of guests, but Goethe's attention became fixed on a girl seated at a piano, and playing, as he informs us, with grace and facility. The house was that of Frau Schönemann, the widow of a rich banker, and the girl who had excited Goethe's interest was her only daughter, Anna Elisabeth, known by the pet name of Lili—the name by which she is designated in Goethe's own references to her. The musician having risen, Goethe exchanged a few polite compliments with her, and when he took his leave for the evening, the mother expressed the wish that he would soon repeat his visit, the daughter at the same time indicating that his presence would not be disagreeable to her.

The houses of the Goethes and the Schönemanns were only some hundred paces apart, but there had hitherto been no intercourse between the two families, and the reason for this isolation is a significant fact in the relations between Goethe and Lili that were to follow. The Schönemanns moved in a social circle which was rigidly closed to the burgher element in the city, and, when Frau Schönemann gave Goethe the *entrée* to her house, it was because he was an exceptional member of the class to which he belonged. In making the acquaintance of the Schönemanns, therefore, he had already to a certain degree compromised himself.<sup>1</sup> In his own account of his relations to Lili he does not disguise the fact that her mother and the friends of the family hardly concealed their feeling that the Goethes were not of their order. In seeking further intercourse with the Schönemanns he was thus putting himself in a delicate position, and the fact that he deliberately chose to do so is proof that his first sight of Lili must have touched his inflammable heart.

During the month of January Goethe became a frequent visitor at the Schönemanns, and there began those relations with Lili which, according to his own later testimony, were to give a new direction to his life, as being the immediate cause of his leaving Frankfort and settling in Weimar. If we are to accept his own averment two years before his death, Lili was the first whom he had really loved, all his other affairs of the heart being "inclinations of no importance."<sup>2</sup> So he spoke in the retrospect, under the influence of an immediate emotion, but his own

<sup>1</sup> In a letter written to Johanna Fahlmer from Weimar (April 10, 1776) Goethe vehemently expresses his dislike of the Schönemann kin. "I have long hated them," he says, "from the bottom of my heart. . . . I pity the poor creature [Lili] that she was born into such a race."

<sup>2</sup> Eckermann, March 5, 1830. What has been said of Chateaubriand, who made use of a similar expression, may probably be said with greater truth of Goethe, "Il ment à ses propres souvenirs et à son cœur." In a letter to Frau von Stein (May 24, 1776) Goethe describes his relation to Friederike Brion as "das reinste, schönste, wahrste, das ich ausser meiner Schwester je zu einem Weibe gehabt."

contemporary testimony proves that his love for Lili was at least not unmingled bliss. Make what reserves we may for the artificial working up of sentiment which was the fashion of the time, that testimony presents us with the picture of a lover who has to contend not only with obstacles which circumstances put in his way, but with the haunting conviction that his passion was leading him astray and that its gratification involved the surrender of his deepest self. As in the case of others of his love passages, his relations with Lili evoked a series of literary productions of which they are the inspiration and the commentary, and which exhibit new developments of his genius. We have lyrics addressed to her which, though differently inspired from those addressed to Friederike, take their place with the choicest he has written; we have plays more or less directly bearing on the situation in which he found himself; and, finally, we have his letters to various correspondents in which every phase of his passion is recorded at the moment.

In Lili Schöнемann Goethe had a different object from any of his previous loves. Käthchen Schönpkopf, Friederike, Lotte Buff had all been socially his inferiors, and he could play "the conquering lord" with them. Lili, on the other hand, was his superior socially—a fact of which her relatives and friends seem to have made him fully conscious. Moreover, though he was in his twenty-sixth year, and she only in her sixteenth, her personal character and her upbringing had given her a maturity beyond that of any of his previous loves. She was clever and accomplished, and already, as a desirable *partie*, she had a considerable experience of masculine arts. As she is represented in her portraits, the firm poise of her head and her clear-cut features suggest the dignity, decision, and self-control of which her subsequent life was to give proof.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> She is described as a pretty blonde, with blue eyes and fair hair. In a letter (March 30, 1801) addressed to Lili, then a widow, Goethe writes:



The first two lyrics he addressed to Lili reveal all the difference between his relations to her and to Friederike. Those addressed to Friederike breathe the confidence of returned affection unalloyed by any disturbing reservés; in the case of his effusions to Lili there is always a cloud in his heaven which seems to menace a possible storm. In the first of these two lyrics, *Neue Liebe, neues Leben* ("New Love, New Life"), there is even a suggestion of regret to find that he is entangled in a fresh passion. What is noteworthy in connection with all his poems inspired by Lili, however, is that they are completely free from the sentimentality of those he had written under the influence of the ladies of Darmstadt. Though differing in tone from the lyrics addressed to Friederike, they have all their directness, simplicity, and economy of expression. In his Autobiography he tells us that there could be no doubt that Lili ruled him, and in *Neue Liebe, neues Leben*, he acknowledges the spell she has laid upon him with a highly-wrought art without previous example in German literature.

Herz, mein Herz, was soll das geben?  
 Was bedrängt dich so sehr?  
 Welch ein fremdes neues Leben!  
 Ich erkenne dich nicht mehr.  
 Weg ist alles, was du liebtest,<sup>1</sup>  
 Weg, warum du dich betrübtest,  
 Weg dein Fleiss und deine Ruh!—  
 Ach, wie kamst du nur dazu!

Fesselt dich die Jugendblüte,  
 Diese liebliche Gestalt,  
 Dieser Blick voll Treu' und Güte  
 Mit unendlicher Gewalt?  
 Will ich rasch mich ihr entziehen,  
 Mich ermannen, ihr entfliehen,  
 Führet mich im Augenblick  
 Ach, mein Weg zu ihr zurück.

Und an diesem Zauberfädchen,  
 Das sich nicht zerreißen lässt,  
 Hält das liebe, lose Mädchen  
 Mich so wider Willen fest;

<sup>1</sup> "Sie haben in den vergangenen Jahren viel ausgestanden und dabei, wie ich weiss, einen entschlossenen Mut bewiesen, der Ihnen Ehre macht."

Muss in ihrem Zauberkreise  
Leben nun auf ihre Weise.  
Die Veränd' rung, ach, wie gross !  
Liebe ! Liebe, lass mich los !

Say, heart of me, what this importeth ;  
What distresseth thee so sore ?  
New and strange all life and living ;  
Thee I recognize no more.  
Gone is everything thou loved'st ;  
All for which thyself thou troubled'st ;  
Gone thy toil, and gone thy peace ;  
Ah ! how cam'st thou in such case ?

Fetters thee that youthful freshness ?  
Fetters thee that lovely mien ?  
That glance so full of truth and goodness,  
With an adamantine chain ?  
Vain the hardy wish to tear me  
From those meshes that ensnare me ;  
For the moment I would flee,  
Straight my path leads back to thee.

By these slender threads enchanted,  
Which to rend no power avails,  
That dear wanton maiden holds me  
Thus relentless in her spells.  
Thus within her charmed round  
Must I live as one spellbound ;  
Heart ! what mighty change in thee :  
Love, O love, ah, set me free !

In the second lyric, *An Belinden*, he pictures in the same tone of half regret the case in which he finds himself, and the picture has an eloquent commentary in his letters of the time. He who had lately spent his peaceful evenings in the solitude of his own chamber dreaming of her image had through her been irresistibly drawn into an alien and uncongenial world. Is he the same being who now sits at the card-table amid the glaring lights of a fashionable drawing-room in the presence of hateful faces ? For her, however, he will gladly endure what he loathes with his whole soul.

Reizender ist mir des Frühlings Blüte  
Nun nicht auf der Flur ;  
Wo du, Engel, bist, ist Lieb' and Güte,  
Wo du bist, Natur.

Now the blooms of springtide on the meadow  
 Touch no more my heart;  
 Where thou, angel, art, is love and goodness;  
 Nature, where thou art.

So he sang in tones befitting the true lover, but, as it happens, we have a prose commentary from his own hand which gives perhaps a truer picture of his real state of mind. Towards the end of January, when he was already deep in his passion for Lili, he received a letter which opened a new channel for his emotions. The letter came from an anonymous lady who, as she explained, had been so profoundly moved by the tale of Werther that she could not resist the impulse to express her gratitude to its author. The fair unknown, as he was subsequently to discover, was no less distinguished a person than an Imperial Countess—the Countess Stolberg, sister of two equally fervid youths, of whom we shall presently hear in connection with Goethe. It was quite in keeping with the spirit of the time that two persons of different sexes, who had never seen each other, should proceed mutually to unbosom themselves with a freedom of self-revelation which an age habituated to greater reticence finds it difficult to understand; and there began a correspondence between Goethe and his adorer in which we have the astonishing spectacle of her becoming the confidant of all his emotions with regard to another woman, while he is using the language of passion towards herself.<sup>1</sup> Here is the opening sentence of his first letter to her, and it strikes the note of all that was to follow: “My dear—I will give you no name, for what are the names Friend, Sister, Beloved, Bride, Wife, or any word that is a complex of all these, compared with the direct feeling—with the—— I cannot write further. Your letter has taken possession of me at a wonderful time.”<sup>2</sup>

In his second letter to her, while she was still

<sup>1</sup> It may be regarded as significant that Goethe makes no reference to the Countess in his *Autobiography*.

<sup>2</sup> January 18–30, 1775.



unknown to him, written about three weeks later (February 13), he depicts the condition in which we are to imagine him at the time it was penned. It will be seen that it is a prose rendering of the lines *An Belinden*, to which reference has just been made. "If, my dear one, you can picture to yourself a Goethe who, in a laced coat, and otherwise clad from head to foot with finery in tolerable keeping, in the idle glare of sconces and lustres, amid a motley throng of people, is held a prisoner at a card-table by a pair of beautiful eyes; who in alternating distraction is driven from company to concert and from concert to ball, and with all the interest of frivolity pays his court to a pretty blonde, you have the present carnival-Goethe. . . . But there is another Goethe—one in grey beaver coat with brown silk necktie and boots—who already divines the approach of spring in the caressing February breezes, to whom his dear wide world will again be shortly opened up, who, ever living his own life, striving and working, seeks to express, according to the measure of his powers, now the innocent feelings of youth in little poems, and the strong spice of life in various dramas; now the images of his friends, of his neighbourhood and his beloved household goods, with chalk upon grey paper; never asking the question how much of what he has done will endure, because in toiling he is always ascending a step higher, because he will spring after no ideal, but, in play or strenuous effort, will let his feelings spontaneously develop into capacities."<sup>1</sup>

The plays to which Goethe refers in this letter form part of his intellectual and emotional history during the period of his relations to Lili. In themselves these plays have little merit, and, had they come from the hand of some minor poet, they would deservedly have passed into oblivion, but as part of his biography they call for some notice. The first of them, *Erwin und Elmire*, is a sufficiently trivial vaudeville, and appears to have been begun in the autumn

<sup>1</sup> February 13, 1775.

of 1773.<sup>1</sup> He must have retouched it in January—February (1775), however, as it contains distinct suggestions of his experiences with the Schöнемann family. As he himself tells us in his Autobiography, the piece was suggested by Goldsmith's ballad, *Edwin and Angelina*, and both the choice and the handling of the subject illustrate his remark in the foregoing letter regarding the fugitive nature of the various things which he threw off at this time.<sup>2</sup> There are four characters—Olimpia and her daughter Elmire, Bernardo, a friend of the family, and Erwin, Elmire's lover. Elmire plays the part of capricious coquette with such effect that she drives her despairing lover to hide himself from the world and to retreat to a hermitage which he constructs for himself in the neighbouring wilds. Elmire now realizes her hard-heartedness, and exhibits such symptoms of distress as to waken the concern of her mother and Bernardo. Bernardo, however, is in Erwin's secret, and contrives to bring the two lovers together and to effect a happy reconciliation, to the satisfaction of all parties—the mother included. The play was dedicated to Lili in the following lines :—

Den kleinen Strauss, den ich dir binde,  
Pflückt' ich aus diesem Herzen hier ;  
Nimm ihn gefällig auf, Belinde !  
Der kleine Strauss, er ist von mir.

This posy that I bind for thee  
I cull'd it from my very heart ;  
This little posy, 'tis from me ;  
Take it, Belinda, in good part.

There was a sufficient reason for Goethe's praying Lili to take the piece "in good part." In the cruel coquette Elmire Lili could not but see a portrait of herself, and there are expressions in the play which she could not but regard as home-thrusts. "To be entertained, to be amused," says Erwin to Bernardo,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of October, 1773, to Kestner.

<sup>2</sup> He says of the piece that it cost him "little expenditure of mind and feeling." *It*

“that is all they [the maidens] desire. They value a man who spends an odious evening with them at cards as highly as the man who gives his body and soul for them.” In another remark of Erwin’s there is a reference to Goethe’s own relations to Lili and her family which she could not misunderstand. “I loved her with an enduring love. To that love I gave my whole heart. But because I am poor, I was scorned. And yet I hoped through my diligence to make as suitable a provision for her as any of the beplastered windbags.” Trivial as the play is, it was acted in Frankfort during Goethe’s absence,<sup>1</sup> and at a later date he considered it worth his while to recast it in another form.

*Erwin und Elmire* was followed by another play, more remarkable from its contents, but by general agreement of as little importance from a literary point of view. This was *Stella*, significantly designated in its original form as *A Play for Lovers*. Unlike *Erwin und Elmire*, it was wholly the production of this period—the end of February and the beginning of March being the probable date of its composition. Though written at the height of his passion for Lili, however, it contains fewer direct references to his experiences of the moment than *Erwin und Elmire*. Any interest that attaches to *Stella* lies in the fact of its being a lively presentment of a phase of Goethe’s own experience and of the world of factitious sentiment which made that experience possible. No other of Goethe’s youthful productions, indeed, better illustrates the literary emotionalism of the time when it was written, and some notion of its character and scope is desirable in view of all his relations to Lili.

The drama opens in a posting-house, where two travellers, Madame Somner (Cäcilie) and her daughter

<sup>1</sup> Goethe was not known to be the author. In a letter to Johanna Fahlmer, he expresses his curiosity to know if Lili was present at its performance. *Erwin und Elmire*, it should be said, contains two of Goethe’s most beautiful songs, the one beginning “Ein Veilchen auf der Wiese stand,” and the other “Ihr verblühet, süsse Rosen.”



Lucie, have alighted. The object of their journey is to place Lucie as a companion with a lady living on an estate in the neighbourhood. From the conversation of the mother and daughter we learn that Cécilie had been deserted by her husband, and was now in such reduced circumstances as to necessitate her daughter's finding some employment. On inquiring of the postmistress they gain some information regarding the lady they are in search of. She also had been deserted by one who was her reputed husband, and since then had spent her days in mournful solitude and good works. Fatigued by her journey, Cécilie retires to rest, and Lucie, carefully instructed not to reveal the position of herself and her mother, sets out to interview the strange lady. During her absence there arrives at the posting-house a gentleman in military dress, who presently falls into a tearful soliloquy, from which we learn that he is no other than Fernando, the husband of Cécilie, and that the strange lady is Stella, whom he had also deserted and with whom he now proposes to renew his former relations. Lucie returns, delighted with her visit to Stella, and there ensues a bantering conversation between the father and daughter, both, of course, equally ignorant of their relation to each other. So ends the first Act; with the second begin the embarrassments of the difficult situation. Cécilie and Lucie repair to Stella, and, after an effusive exchange of memories between the two deserted ones, Stella invites both mother and daughter to make their home with her. Unfortunately Stella brings forth the portrait of her former lover, in whom to her horror Cécilie recognizes her husband, and Lucie to her surprise recognizes the officer at the posting-house—a fact which she makes known to Stella. In an ecstasy of excited expectation Stella dispatches a servant with the order to fetch the long-lost one, and Cécilie, retiring to the garden, communicates to Lucie the discovery of her father. In the rapidly succeeding scenes that follow the three chief persons

experience alternations of agony and bliss which find facile expression in many sighs, tears, and embraces. Fernando and Stella, lost in the present and oblivious of the past, melt in their new-found bliss, but are interrupted in their raptures by the announcement that Cäcilie and Lucie are preparing to take their departure. At Stella's request Fernando finds Cäcilie, whom he at first does not recognize. Mutual recognition follows, however, when Fernando vows that he will never again leave her, and proposes that he and she and Lucie should make off at once. Meanwhile, Stella is pouring forth her bliss over the grave which, like one of the Darmstadt ladies, she has had dug for herself in her garden. Here she is joined by Fernando, whose altered mood fills her with a vague dread which is converted into horror when, on the entrance of Cäcilie and Lucie, Fernando acknowledges them as his wife and daughter. After paroxysms of emotion all the parties separate, and Stella prepares to take her flight after a vain attempt to cut Fernando's portrait out of its frame. She is interrupted in her intention of flight by the appearance of Fernando, and there follows a dialogue in which we are to look for the drift of the play. Cäcilie insists on departing and leaving the two lovers to their happiness. "I feel," she says, "that my love for thee is not selfish, is not the passion of a lover, which would give up all to possess its longed-for object . . . it is the feeling of a wife, who out of love itself can give up love." Fernando, however, passionately declares that he will never abandon her, and Cäcilie makes a happy suggestion that will solve all difficulties. Was it not recorded of a German Count that he brought home a maiden from the Holy Lands and that she and his wife happily shared his affections between them? And such is the solution which commends itself to all parties. Fernando impartially embraces both ladies, and Cäcilie's concluding remark is: "We are thine!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In deference to the general opinion that this ending was immoral, Goethe, in a later form of the play, makes Fernando shoot himself.

Such is the play which, in a bad English translation that did not mitigate its absurdities, provoked the wit of the *Anti-Jacobin*.<sup>1</sup> In Fernando, the central figure of the play, we are, of course, to recognize Goethe himself,<sup>2</sup> and in no other of his dramas has he presented a less attractive character. Weislingen, Clavigo, and Werther have all their redeeming qualities, but Fernando is an emotional egotist incapable of any worthy motive, and it is the most serious blemish in the play, even in view of the factitious world in which it moves, that he is made the adored idol of two such different women as Cäcilie and Stella. The situation, as Goethe himself tells us, was suggested by the relations of Swift to Stella and Vanessa, but he did not need to go so far afield for a motive. In the world around him he was familiar both with the creed and the practice which the conclusion of the play approves. As we have seen, it was openly held by enlightened and moral persons that marriage, as being a mere contract, was incompatible with a true union of souls, and that such a union was only to be found in irresponsible relations. In the case of his friend Fritz Jacobi, whose character and talents had all his admiration, he had a practical illustration of the creed; for Jacobi had a wife and also a friend (his step-aunt Johanna Fahlmer) in whom he found a more responsive recipient of his emotions. But it is rather in Goethe's own character and experience that we are to look for the origin of *Stella*; it is in truth an analytic presentment of what he had himself known and felt. As we have seen, one object was incapable of engrossing all his affections; while he was paying court to Lili, his wandering desires went out to the fair correspondent who had evinced such interest in his troubles and aspirations. It would seem that he required two types of woman such as

<sup>1</sup> *Stella* and other German plays are wittily parodied in *The Rovers*; or, *The Double Arrangement*.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe gives Fernando his own brown eyes and black hair.



he has depicted in *Stella* to satisfy at once his mind and heart: a Cécilie who inspired him with respect as well as affection, and a Stella whose self-abandonment left his passions their free course.

Nauseous as *Stella* must appear to the modern reader, it found wide acceptance at the period it was written, though its moral was generally condemned. Herder was enthusiastic in its praise, and on its publication at the end of January, 1776, it passed through four editions in a single week. In 1805, with its altered *dénouement*, in which the hero shoots himself, it was performed with applause in Berlin, and it was frequently produced afterwards. Goethe himself continued to retain a singular affection for the most sickly sentimental of all his literary offspring, and he subsequently sent a copy of his work to Lili, accompanied by some lines which were worthy of a better gift.<sup>1</sup>

Im holden Thal, auf schneebedeckten Höhen  
 War stets dein Bild mir nah ;  
 Ich sah's um mich in lichten Wolken wehen ;  
 Im Herzen war mir's da.  
 Empfinde hier, wie mit allmächt'gem Triebe  
 Ein Herz das andre zieht,  
 Und dass vergebens Liebe  
 Vor Liebe flieht!

In the dear vale, on heights the snow-wreaths cover,  
 Still was thine image near ;  
 I saw it round me in the bright clouds hover ;  
 My heart beheld it there.  
 Here learn to feel with what resistless power  
 One heart the other ties ;  
 That vain it is when lover  
 From lover flies !

Still another piece belongs to the first months of Goethe's relations to Lili—*Claudine von Villa Bella*, which appears to have been written intermittently in April and May. Like *Erwin und Elmire* it is in operatic form—the prose dialogue being diversified with outbursts of song. Entirely trivial as a work of

<sup>1</sup> After he had broken with her, and settled in Weimar.

art, it calls for passing notice only on account of certain characteristics which distinguish it as a product of the period when it was written. The intention of the play, Goethe wrote at a later time, was to exhibit "noble sentiments in association with adventurous actions," and the conduct of his hero and heroine is certainly unconventional, if their feelings are exalted. Claudine is the only daughter of a fond and widowed father, and her dreamy emotionalism would have made her a welcome member of the Darmstadt circle of ladies. She is in love with Pedro, but Pedro is not the hero of the piece. That place is assigned to his eldest brother Crugantino, a scapegrace, with a noble heart, who, finding the ordinary bonds of society too confined for him, has taken to highway robbery. "Your burgher life," he says—and we know that he is here uttering Goethe's own sentiments—"your burgher life is to me intolerable. There, whether I give myself to work or enjoyment, slavery is my lot. Is it not a better choice for one of decent merit to plunge into the world? Pardon me! I don't give a ready ear to the opinion of other people, but pardon me if I let you know mine. I will grant you that if once a man takes to a roving life, no goal and no restraints exist for him; for our heart—ah! it is infinite in its desires so long as its strength remains to it." Crugantino, who with his band is housed at a wretched inn in the neighbourhood, catches sight of Claudine, is bewitched by her beauty, and resolves to gain possession of her. On a beautiful moonlight night, attended by only one companion, he makes his adventurous attempt. Of the charivari that follows it is only necessary to say that Pedro is wounded in a hand-to-hand encounter by his unknown brother Crugantino, and is conveyed to the inn where the band have their quarters. And now comes the turn of Claudine to show her disregard of conventionalities. In agonies for her wounded lover, she dons male attire, and in the middle of the night sets out for the inn where he

is lying. She encounters Crugantino at the door, and their dialogue is overheard by the wounded Pedro who rushes forth to rescue her. A duel ensues between Pedro and Crugantino; the watch appears, and all parties are conveyed to the village prison. Here they are found by the distracted father and his friend Sebastian, and a general explanation follows—Pedro being made secure of Claudine, and Crugantino showing himself a repentant sinner. With this fantastic production, which, beginning in an atmosphere of pure sentiment, ends in broad farce, Goethe was even in middle life so satisfied that he recast it in verse, and made other alterations which in the opinion of most critics did not improve the original.<sup>1</sup>

The triviality of these successive performances, so void of the mind and heart displayed in the fragmentary *Prometheus* and *Der Ewige Jude*, have their commentary in his continued relations to Lili Schöнемann. They even raise the question whether his passion for her were really so consuming as in his old age he declared it to have been. They at least speak a very different language from that of the simple lyrics in which he expressed his love for Friederike Brion. Yet when we turn to his correspondence, written on the inspiration of the moment, we find all the indications of a genuinely distracted lover.

During the month of March we are to believe that he underwent all the pangs of a passionate wooer. Surrounded by numerous admirers, Lili was difficult of access, and apparently took some pleasure in reminding him that he was only one among others.<sup>2</sup> "Oh! if I did not compose dramas," he wrote on the 6th to his confidant the Countess, "I should be shipwrecked." A few days of unalloyed bliss he did

<sup>1</sup> During his residence in Rome in 1787. He recast *Erwin und Elmire* at the same time.

<sup>2</sup> To this period probably belongs *Lili's Park*, the most playfully humorous of Goethe's poems, in which he banters Lili on her capricious treatment of himself (represented as a bear) as one of her menagerie—the motley crowd of her suitors.



enjoy, and the length at which he records them in his Autobiography shows that they remained a vivid memory with him. In the course of the month Lili spent some time with an uncle at Offenbach on the Main, and, joining her there, Goethe found her all that his heart could wish. "Take the girl to your heart; it will be good for you both," he wrote out of his bliss to his other female confidant, Johanna Fahlmer.<sup>1</sup>

On their return to Frankfort, however, his former griefs were renewed, and a new distraction was added to them. "I am delighted that you are so enamoured of my *Stella*," he writes to Fritz Jacobi on March 21, immediately after his return; "my heart and mind are now turned in such entirely different directions that my own flesh and blood is almost indifferent to me. I can tell you nothing, for what is there that can be said? I will not even think either of to-morrow or of the day after to-morrow."<sup>2</sup> The truth is that, as he tells us in his Autobiography, he was now in an embarrassing position. His relations to Lili had become such that a decisive step was necessary in the interests of both. During the last fortnight of March his mood was certainly not that of a happy lover. To break with Lili was a step which circumstances as well as his own attachment to her made a dire alternative. On the other hand, from the bond of marriage, as we know, he shrank with every instinct of his nature. Only a few weeks before, doubtless with his own possible fate in front of him, he had put these words into the mouth of one of his characters: "I would be a fool to allow

<sup>1</sup> Certain pranks played by Goethe during his stay in Offenbach show that he was not wholly given up to "lover's melancholy." On a moonlight night, robed in a white sheet, and mounted on stilts (a form of exercise to which he was addicted), he went through the town and created a panic among the inhabitants by looking into their windows. On another occasion, at a baptism, he secretly deposited the baby in a dish, and covering it with a towel, placed the dish on a table where the company were assembled. It was only after some time that the contents of the dish were revealed.

<sup>2</sup> March 21, 1775.

myself to be shackled. That state [marriage] smothers all my powers ; that state robs me of all my spirits, cramps my whole being. I must forth into the free world." Goethe did eventually take the decision that he deprecated, but not just yet. On March 25 he wrote to Herder : " It seems as if the twisted threads on which my fate hangs, and which I have so long shaken to and fro in oscillating rotation, would at last unite." <sup>1</sup> On the 29th, Klopstock, who had come on a few days' visit to Frankfort, found him in " strange agitation." <sup>2</sup> As so often happened in Goethe's life, it was an accident that determined his wavering purpose. In the beginning of April there came to Frankfort a Mademoiselle Delf, an old friend of the Schöнемann family, whom Goethe made acquainted with his father and mother. A person of strenuous character, she took it upon her to bring matters to a point between the two households. With the consent of Lili's mother, she brought Lili one evening to the Goethe house. " Take each other by the hand," she said in commanding tones ; and the two lovers obeyed and embraced. " It was a remarkable decree of the powers that rule us," is the characteristic reflection of the aged Goethe, " that in the course of my singular career I should also experience the feelings of one betrothed."

Goethe's feelings as a betrothed were from the first of a mingled nature. No sooner had he given his pledge than all the complications which must result from his union with Lili stared him in the face. Even after the betrothal the relations between the two families did not become more cordial. Not only were they divided by difference of social standing ; a deeper ground of mutual antagonism lay in their religion. The Schöнемanns adhered to the Reformed persuasion, the Protestantism of the higher classes, while the Goethes were Lutheran, as were the majority of the class to which they belonged ; and between the two denominations there was bitter

<sup>1</sup> March 25, 1775.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of April 14, 1775.

and permanent estrangement.<sup>1</sup> And there was still another stumbling-block in the way of a probable happy union. Goethe was not earning an independent income, and, in the event of his marriage, he and his bride would have to take up their quarters under his parental roof. But, accustomed to the gay pleasures of a fashionable circle, how would Lili accommodate herself to the homely ways and surroundings of the Goethe household? Moreover, we have it from Goethe himself that Lili was distasteful equally to his father and to his mother—the former sarcastically speaking of her as “Die Stadtdame.” Such, he realized, was the future before him as the husband of Lili; and he had no sooner bound himself to her than he was reduced to distraction by conflicting desires. In some words he wrote to Herder within a fortnight after his betrothal we have a glimpse of his state of mind. “A short time ago,” he wrote, “I was under the delusion that I was approaching the haven of domestic bliss and a sure footing in the realities of earthly joy and sorrow, but I am again in unhappy wise cast forth on the wide sea.”<sup>2</sup> He was already, in fact, contemplating the desirability of bursting his bond; and an opportunity came to assist him in his resolve.

In the second week of May there came to Frankfort three youths whose rank and personal character created a flutter in the Goethe household. Two of them were the brothers of the Countess Stolberg,<sup>3</sup> with whom Goethe had been carrying on his platonic correspondence during the previous months, and who were on their way to a tour in Switzerland. All were enthusiastic adherents of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, and Goethe had long been the object of their distant adoration. They were not disappointed in their idol, and the first meeting,

<sup>1</sup> Frau Schöнемann is recorded to have said that the different religion of the two families was the cause of the match being broken off.

<sup>2</sup> May, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> The third was Count Haugnitz, of more subdued temper than his companions.



according to both Stolbergs, sufficed to establish a general union of hearts. "Goethe," wrote the elder, "is a delightful fellow. The fulness of fervid sensibility streams out of his every word and feature."<sup>1</sup> During the few days they spent in Frankfort the three scions of nobility were frequent guests in the Goethe house, and their talk must have been enlivening if we may judge from the specimen of it recorded by Goethe himself. The conversation had turned on the ill-deeds of tyrants, a favourite theme with the youth of the time, and, heated with wine, the three youths expressed a vehement desire for the blood of all such. The Herr Rath smiled and shook his head, but his helpmate hastily ran to the wine-cellar and produced a bottle of her best, exclaiming, "Here is the true tyrant's blood. Feast on it, but let no murderous thoughts go forth from my house."

In the company of these choice spirits Goethe decided to leave Frankfort for a time, and with the set resolve, if possible, to efface all thoughts of Lili. Characteristically he did not take a formal leave of her, a proceeding which was naturally resented both by herself and by her relatives. The quartette started on May 14, and from the first they made it appear that they meant to travel as four geniuses who set at naught all accepted conventions.<sup>2</sup> Before departing they all procured Werther costume—blue coat, yellow waistcoat and hose, and round grey hat; and in this array they disported themselves throughout their travels. Darmstadt was their first halting-place, and at the Court there they conducted themselves with some regard to decorum. Outside its precincts, however, they gave full rein to their eccentricities, and so scandalized the Darmstadters by publicly bathing in a pond in the neighbourhood that they found it advisable to beat a hasty retreat from the town. In Darmstadt Goethe had met his old

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 55.

<sup>2</sup> According to Goethe, Count Haugnitz was the only one of the four who showed any sense of propriety.

mentor, Merck, who with his usual caustic frankness told him that he was making a fool of himself in keeping company with such madcaps.<sup>1</sup> At Mannheim, their next stage, the whole party signalized themselves by smashing the wine-glasses from which they had drunk to the ladylove of the younger Stolberg. The presence of distinguished personages at Carlsruhe, their next stage, kept their vivacity within bounds so long as they remained there. Just at this moment the young Duke of Weimar had come to Carlsruhe to betroth himself to the Princess Luise of Hesse-Darmstadt, and from both Goethe received a cordial invitation to visit them at Weimar. Another distinguished person then in the town was Klopstock, who received Goethe with such undisguised kindness that he was induced to read aloud to him the latest scenes of a work of which we shall hear presently.<sup>2</sup> At Carlsruhe Goethe parted company from his fellow-travellers with the intention of visiting his sister at Emmendingen. On May 22 he was at Strassburg, where he spent several days, renewing old acquaintances, especially with his former monitor, Salzmann, but, for reasons we can appreciate, he did not present himself at Sesenheim.

From Strassburg he proceeded to Emmendingen, where he spent the first week of June with his sister, whom he had not seen since her marriage with Schlosser. For various reasons he had looked forward to their meeting with painful feelings. He knew that she had been unhappy in her marriage, and must expect to find her naturally depressed temper soured by her conjugal experience. Their main theme of conversation was his betrothal to Lili, and it was with a vehemence born of her own bitter experience that Cornelia urged him to break off a connection which the relations of all immediately concerned too surely foreboded must end in disaster. The warning of

<sup>1</sup> It was at this time that Merck gave his famous definition of Goethe's genius. See above, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> The *Urfaust*.

Cornelia, we might have expected, should have been welcome as confirming his own struggling attempts to break loose from his bonds, but, if his later memories did not betray him, it only laid a heavier load on his heart. His real state of mind at the time we have in a letter to Johanna Fahlmer, written while he was still with his sister. "I feel," he wrote, "that the chief aim of my journey has failed, and when I return it will be worse for the Bear<sup>1</sup> than before. I know well that I am a fool, but for that very reason I am I."<sup>2</sup> The parting of the brother and sister—and the parting was to be for ever<sup>3</sup>—must have been with heavy misgivings for both. To her brother alone had Cornelia been bound by any tender tie; he alone of her family had understood and sympathized with her singular temperament, and her greatest happiness had been derived from following his career of brilliant promise and achievement. It must, therefore, have been with dark forebodings that she saw before him the possibility of a union which in her eyes must be fatal alike to his peace of mind and to the development of his genius. On his side, also, Goethe must have parted from his sister with the sad conviction that the gloom that lay upon her life could never be lifted. She had been the one never-failing confidant of the troubles alike of his heart and of his intellectual ambitions, and it was from her that in his present distraction he had naturally sought sympathy and counsel. It is with the tenderest touch that in his reminiscent record of this their last meeting he depicts her "problematical" nature, and pays his tribute to all that she had been to him.<sup>4</sup>

It had been Goethe's original intention to end his travels with the visit to his sister, but, as their main

<sup>1</sup> Goethe was known as the "Bear" or the "Huron" among his friends.

<sup>2</sup> June 5, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> Cornelia died in June, 1777, when Goethe was settled in Weimar.

<sup>4</sup> On Cornelia's death he wrote to his mother: "Mit meiner Schwester ist mir so eine starke Wurzel die mich an der Erde hielt abgehauen worden, dass die Aeste von oben, die davon Nahrung haben, auch absterben müssen."



object was as far off as ever, he decided to rejoin his late companions and to accompany them to Switzerland. By way of Schaffhausen they proceeded to Zurich, where Goethe's first act was to seek Lavater. Their talk during his stay in Zurich mainly turned on Lavater's great work on Physiognomy, to which Goethe had continuously contributed by help and counsel, though from the first he was sceptical of its scientific value. Their intercourse was as cordial as it had been in the previous year, and Lavater was subjugated more than ever by the personality of Goethe. "Who can think more differently than Goethe and I," he wrote to Wieland, who was still suspicious of his youthful adversary, "and yet we are devoted to each other. . . . You will be astonished at the man who unites the fury of the lion with the gentleness of the lamb. I have seen no one at once firmer in purpose and more easily led. . . . Goethe is the most lovable, most affable, most charming of fellows."<sup>1</sup>

In Zurich happened what Merck had foreseen. Goethe had grown tired of his over-exuberant fellow-travellers, whose ways, moreover, did not commend them to the sensitive Lavater. Goethe himself indeed was capable of wild enough pranks, but behind his wild humours lay ever the "serious striving" which was the regulative force of his nature, and which Lavater had recognized from the beginning of their intercourse. A lucky accident gave Goethe the opportunity of escaping from his late comrades without an open breach. In Zurich he found a friend whom he had looked forward to meeting there. This was a native of Frankfort, Passavant by name, who was settled in Switzerland as a Reformed pastor. Passavant was a man of intelligence and attractive character, and when he proposed that they should

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 59. Goethe made Lavater the victim of one of the practical jokes which he was in the habit of playing on his friends. Seeing an unfinished sermon of Lavater on his desk, he completed it during the absence of Lavater, who, in ignorance of the addition, preached the whole sermon as his own.—*Ib.* p. 58.

make a tour together through the smaller Swiss cantons, Goethe jumped at the suggestion.

From Goethe's own narrative of his tour with Passavant we are to infer that the distracting image of Lili was never absent from his mind, and that all the glories of the scenery through which they passed were only its background seen through the haze of his wandering imaginations. And the testimony of the prose narrative in his Autobiography is confirmed by the successive lyrics, prompted by the intrusive image of Lili, which fell from him by the way. In the following lines, composed on the Lake of Zurich on the first morning of their journey, he clothes in poetical form the confession he had made to Johanna Fahlmer from Emmendingen :—

Und frische Nahrung, neues Blut  
Saug' ich aus freier Welt;  
Wie ist Natur so hold und gut,  
Die mich am Busen hält!

Die Welle wieget unsern Kahn  
Im Rudertakt hinauf,  
Und Berge, wolkg himmelan,  
Begegnen unserm Lauf.

Aug', mein Aug', was sinkst du nieder?  
Goldne Träume, kommt ihr wieder?  
Weg, du Traum! so Gold du bist;  
Hier auch Lieb' und Leben ist.

Auf der Welle blinken  
Tausend schwebende Sterne;  
Welche Nebel trinken  
Rings die türmende Ferne;

Morgenwind unflügelt  
Die beschattete Bucht,  
Und im See bespiegelt  
Sich die reifende Frucht.

Fresh cheer and quickened blood I suck  
From this wide world and free;  
How dear is Nature and how good!  
A mother unto me!

Rocked by the wavelets speeds our skiff  
To the oar's measured beat;  
Cloudcapped, the heaven-aspiring hills  
Appear our course to meet.

Why sink my eyelids as I gaze?  
 Ye golden dreams of other days,  
 Come ye again? Though ne'er so dear,  
 Begone! Are life and love not here?

The o'erhanging stars are twinkling  
 In myriads on the mere;  
 In floating mists enfolded  
 The far heights disappear.

The morning breeze is coursing  
 Round the deep-shadowed cove;  
 And in its depths are imaged  
 The ripening fruits above.

Looking down on the same lake from its southern ridges, he writes these lines, the concentrated expression of distracted emotions:—

Wenn ich, liebe Lili, dich nicht liebte,  
 Welche Wonne gäb' mir dieser Blick!  
 Und doch, wenn ich, Lili, dich nicht liebte,  
 Fänd' ich hier und fänd' ich dort mein Glück?

If I, loved Lili, loved thee not,  
 In this prospect, ah! what bliss;  
 Yet, Lili, if I loved thee not,  
 Where should I find my happiness?

In the cloister of the church at Einsiedeln he saw a beautiful gold crown, and his first thought was how it would become the brows of Lili. On the night of June 21 the two travellers reached the hospice in the pass of St. Gothard—the term of their journey. Next morning they saw the path that led down to Italy, and, according to Goethe's account, Passavant vehemently urged that they should make the descent together. For a few moments he was undecided, but the memories of Lili conquered. Drawing forth a golden heart, her gift, which he wore round his neck, he kissed it, and his resolution was taken. Hastily turning from the tempting path, he began his homeward descent, his companion reluctantly following him.<sup>1</sup>

According to a tradition in the Passavant family, it was Goethe, not Passavant, who was so eager to descend into Italy.—Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. 58.



On July 22, after a leisurely journey homewards, he was again in Frankfort, and in a state of mind as undecided as ever regarding his future course. Fortunately or unfortunately for himself and the world, circumstances independent of his own will were to decide between the alternatives that lay before him.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LAST MONTHS IN FRANKFORT—THE *URFAUST*

1775

As he represents it in his Autobiography, this was the situation in which Goethe found himself on his return to Frankfort. All his personal friends warmly welcomed him back, though his father did not conceal his disappointment that he had not continued his travels into Italy. As for Lili, she had taken it for granted that the departure of her betrothed without a word of leave-taking could only imply his intention to break with her. Yet it was reported to him that in the face of all obstacles to their union she had declared herself ready to leave her past behind her and share his fortunes in America. Their intercourse was resumed, but they avoided seeing each other alone, as if conscious of some ground of mutual estrangement. "It was an accursed state, in some ways resembling Hades, the meeting-place of the sadly-happy dead." In view of these relations between Lili and himself, he further adds, all their common friends were decidedly opposed to their union.

Such is the account which, in his retrospect, Goethe gives of his situation after his return to Frankfort, but his correspondence at the time shows that it cannot be accepted as strictly accurate. During the three remaining months he spent in Frankfort, he on four different occasions visited Offenbach, where he must often have seen her alone. What his letters indeed prove is that he was characteristically content to let each day bring its own

happiness or misery, and to leave events to decide the final issue. On August 1, a few days after his return, he writes to Knebel: "I am here again . . . and find myself a good deal better, quite content with the past and full of hope for the future."<sup>1</sup> Two days later he was in Offenbach, and from Lili's own room he writes as follows to the Countess: "Oh! that I could tell you all. Here in the room of the girl who is the cause of my misery—without her fault, with the soul of an angel, over whose cheerful days I cast a gloom, I! . . . In vain that for three months I have wandered under the open sky and drunk in a thousand new objects with all my senses."<sup>2</sup> To Lavater on the following day he writes that he has been riding with Lili, and adds these words with a N.B.: "For some time I have been pious again; my desire is for the Lord, and I sing psalms to Him, a vibration of which shall soon reach you. Adieu. I am in a sore state of strain; I might say overstrain. Yet I wish you were with me, for then it goes well in my surroundings."<sup>3</sup> A letter addressed to Merck later in the same month would seem to show that he had at least no intention of seeking an immediate union with Lili. By the end of the year at the latest, he says, he must be off to Italy, and he prays Merck to prevail with his father to grant his consent.

A crisis in the relations between the lovers came on the occasion of the Frankfort fair in the second week of September. The fair brought a crowd of males, young, middle-aged, and old, all on more or less intimate terms with the Schöнемann family, and their familiarities with Lili were gall and wormwood to Goethe, though he testifies that, as occasion offered, she did not fail to show who lay nearest her heart. Even in his old age the experience of these days recalled unpleasant memories. "But let us turn," he exclaims, "from this torture, almost

<sup>1</sup> August 1, 1775.

<sup>2</sup> August 3, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> August 4, 1775.



intolerable even in the recollection, to the poems which brought some relief to my mind and heart.”<sup>1</sup> A remarkable contemporary document from his hand proves that his memory did not exaggerate his state of mind at the time.<sup>2</sup> In the form of a Diary, expressly meant for his Countess, he notes day by day the alternating feelings which were distracting him. The Countess had urged him once for all to break his bonds, and in these words we have his reply: “I saw Lili after dinner, saw her at the play. I had not a word to say to her, and said nothing! Would I were free! O Gustchen! and yet I tremble for the moment when she could become indifferent to me, and I become hopeless. But I abide true to myself, and let things go as they will.”<sup>3</sup>

In all this tumultuous effusion we see the side of Goethe's nature which he has depicted in Werther, in Clavigo, and in Fernando. Yet all the while he was completely master of his own genius. Throughout all his alternating raptures and despairs he was assiduously practising the arts to which his genius called him. He diligently contributed both text and drawings to Lavater's *Physiognomy*; he worked at art on his own account, making a special study of Rembrandt; and, as we shall see, even at the time when his relations to Lili were at the breaking-point he was producing poetical work which he never surpassed at any period of his life. From two distinguished contemporaries, both men of mature age, who visited him during this time of his intensest preoccupation with Lili, we have interesting characterizations of him which complement the impressions we receive from his own self-portraiture. The one is from J. G. Sulzer, an author of repute on matters

<sup>1</sup> The two poems, *Lili's Park* and the song beginning “Ihr verblühet, süsse Rosen,” which Goethe refers to this period, were really written at an earlier date. The latter, we have seen, appears in *Erwin und Elmire*.

<sup>2</sup> It was at this time that he translated the Song of Solomon, which he calls “the most glorious collection of love-songs God ever made.”

<sup>3</sup> September 18, 1775. In a letter to the Countess's brothers about the same date, Goethe writes: “Gustchen [the Countess] is an angel. The devil that she is an Imperial Countess.”—October, 1775.

of art. "This young scholar," Sulzer writes, "is a real original genius, untrammelled in his manner of thinking, equally in the sphere of politics and of learning. . . . In intercourse I found him pleasant and amiable. . . . I am greatly mistaken if this young man in his ripe years will not turn out a man of integrity. At present he has not as yet regarded man and human life from many sides. But his insight is keen."<sup>1</sup> The other writer is J. G. Zimmerman, one of the remarkable men of his time, whose book on *Solitude*, published in 1775, had brought him a European reputation. "I have been staying in Frankfort with Monsieur Göthe," he writes, "one of the most extraordinary and most powerful geniuses who has ever appeared in this world. . . . Ah! my friend, if you had seen him in his paternal home, if you had seen how this great man in the presence of his father and mother is the best conducted and most amiable of sons, you would have found it difficult not to regard him through the medium of love."<sup>2</sup>

On October 12, 1775, happened an event which was to be the decisive turning-point in Goethe's life. On that day the young Duke of Weimar and his bride arrived in Frankfort on their way home from Carlsruhe, where they had just celebrated their marriage, and again both warmly urged him to visit them at Weimar.<sup>3</sup> We have it on Goethe's own word that he had decided on a second flight from Frankfort as the only escape from his unendurable situation, but the invitation of the ducal pair brought his decision to a point. He accepted the invitation, announced his resolve to all his friends, and made the necessary preparations for his journey. The arrangement was that a gentleman of the Duke's suite, then at Carlsruhe, was to call for him on an appointed day and convey him to Weimar. The appointed day

<sup>1</sup> Biedermann, *op. cit.* i. p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Max Morris, *op. cit.* v. 470.

<sup>3</sup> The Duke had previously passed through Frankfort on his way to Carlsruhe. On that occasion, also, Goethe had been in intercourse with him.

came, but no representative of the Duke appeared. To avoid the embarrassment of meeting friends of whom he had formally taken leave, he kept within doors, working off his impatience in the composition of a play which the world was afterwards to know as *Egmont*. More than another week passed, and, weary of his imprisonment, he stole out in the darkness enveloped in a long cloak to avoid recognition by chance friends. In his memory there lived one of these night-wanderings when he stood beneath Lili's window, heard her sing the song, beginning *Warum ziehst du mich unwiderstehlich*, in which, in the first freshness of his love, he had described the witchery with which she had bound him, and, the song ended, saw from her moving shadow that she paced up and down the room, evidently deep in thoughts which he leaves us to divine. Only his fixed resolve to renounce her, he adds in his narrative of the incident, prevented him from making his presence known to her.

There was one member of the Goethe household who was not displeased at the non-appearance of the ducal representative. The father had from the first been strenuously opposed to his son's going to Weimar, and in his opinion the apparent breach of the appointment was only an illustration of what a commoner was to expect in his intercourse with the great. His own desire was that his son should proceed to Italy with the double object of breaking his connection with Lili, and of enlarging his experience by an acquaintance with that country and its treasures. The embarrassing predicament of his son offered the opportunity of realizing his desire, and he now proposed to him that he should at once start for Italy and leave his cares behind him. In the circumstances there appeared to be no other alternative, and on October 30 Goethe left Frankfort with Italy as his intended goal. Heidelberg was to be his first stage, and on the way thither he began the Journal in which he meant to record the narrative of his travels. The



two pages he wrote are the intense expression of the mental strain in which he set forth on a journey which was to have such a different issue from what he dreamt. The parting from Lili was uppermost in his thoughts. "Adieu, Lili," he wrote, "adieu for the second time! The first time we parted I was full of hope that our lots should one day be united. Fate has decided that we must play our rôles apart."<sup>1</sup>

At Heidelberg he spent a few days in the house of a lady of whom we have already heard—that Mademoiselle Delf who had so effectually brought matters to a point between Goethe and Lili. She was now convinced that the betrothal had been a mistake, but, undismayed, she now suggested to him that there was a lady in Heidelberg who would be a satisfactory substitute for the lost one. One night he had retired to rest, after listening to a protracted exposition of the Fräulein's projects for his future, when he was roused by the sound of a postilion's horn. The postilion brought a letter which cleared up the mystery of the delayed messenger. Hastily dressing, Goethe ordered a postchaise, and, amid the vehement expostulations of his hostess, began the first stage of the journey which was to lead him not to Italy but to the Court of Weimar. It was the most momentous hour of his life, and, as he took his place in the carriage, he called aloud, in mock heroics, to the excited Fräulein words which he may have recently written in *Egmont*, and which had even more significance as bearing on his own future than he could have dreamed at the moment: "Child! Child! Forbear! As if goaded by invisible spirits, the sunsteeds of time bear onward the light car of our destiny; and nothing remains for us but, with calm self-possession, firmly to grasp the reins, and now

<sup>1</sup> This, as we have seen, is not consistent with certain of his former statements.—In June of 1776 Lili was betrothed to another, but, owing to his bankruptcy, marriage did not follow. In 1778, however, she was married to a Strassburg banker. Like all Goethe's loves, she retained a kindly memory of him. She is reported to have said that she regarded herself as owing her best self to him.—Max Morris, *op. cit.* v. 468.

right, now left, to steer the wheels here from the precipice and there from the rock. Whither he is hasting, who knows? Does any one consider whence he came?"<sup>1</sup>

With him to Weimar Goethe bore two manuscripts to which, during his last years in Frankfort, he had, at one time and another, committed his deepest feelings as a man, his profoundest thoughts as a thinker, and his finest imaginations as a poet. The one contained the first draft of the drama which, as we have seen, was written in those days of torturing suspense preceding his final departure from his paternal home, and which, subsequently recast, was to take its place among the best known of his works—*Egmont*. Of far higher moment for the world, however, was the matter contained in the other of these manuscripts. Therein were set down the original portions of a poem which was eventually to fructify into one of the great imaginative products of all time—the drama of *Faust*.

Beyond all other of Goethe's productions previous to his settling in Weimar, these original scenes of *Faust* bring before us his deepest and truest self. In all the other longer works of that period, in *Götz*, in *Werther*, in *Clavigo*, and the rest, one side—the emotional side—of his nature had been predominantly represented; but in what he wrote of *Faust* we have all his mind and heart as he had them from nature, and as they had been schooled by time. It is one of the fortunate incidents in literary history that we now possess these fragments in which the genius of Goethe expressed itself with an intensity of imaginative force which he never again exemplified in the same degree. The original text was unknown till 1887, when Erich Schmidt found it in the possession of a grand-nephew of a lady of the Court of Weimar,<sup>2</sup> who had copied it from the manuscript received by her from Goethe.

<sup>1</sup> Miss Swanwick's translation. Goethe concludes his Autobiography with these words.

<sup>2</sup> Fräulein Luise von Göchhausen.

It is uncertain whether the manuscript thus discovered exactly corresponds to the manuscript which Goethe took with him to Weimar, but the probability is that their contents are virtually identical.

As was the case with *Der Erwige Jude*, *Prometheus*, and other fragments of the Frankfort period, the successive scenes of the *Urfaust* were thrown off at different times on the inspiration of the moment, and the exact date of their production can only be a matter of conjecture. What we do know is that the figure of the legendary Faust had early attracted his attention. As a boy he had read at least one of the chapbooks which recorded the wondrous history of the scholar who had sold himself to the devil, and, as a common spectacle in Germany, he must have seen the puppet-show in which the story of Faust was dramatized for the people. According to his own statement, it was in 1769 that the conception of a poem, based on the Faust legend, first suggested itself to him, but it was during the years 1774 and 1775 that most of the scenes of the *Urfaust* were written. Both by himself and others there are references during these years to his work on *Faust*, and as late as the middle of September, 1775, he tells the Countess Stolberg that, while at Offenbach with Lili, he had composed another scene.

What attracted Goethe to the legend of Faust was that it presented a framework into which he could dramatically work his own life's experience, equally in the world of thought and of feeling. The story that depicted a passionate searcher for truth, rebelling against the limits imposed by the place assigned to man in the nature of things, who at all costs dared to burst these limits in order to enjoy life in all its fulness—this story had a suggestiveness that appealed to Goethe's profoundest consciousness. "I also," he says in his *Autobiography*, "had wandered at large through all the fields of knowledge, and its futility had early enough been shown to me. In life also I had experimented in all manner of ways, and



always returned more dissatisfied and distracted than ever." Of this correspondence which Goethe recognized between the legendary Faust and his own being, the final proof is that on the basis of the legend he eventually constructed the work in which he embodied all that life had taught him of the conditions under which it has to be lived.

When Goethe first put his hand to the *Urfaust*, he had no definite conception of an artistic whole in which the suggestions of the legend should be focussed in view of a determinate end. As we have it, the *Urfaust* consists of twenty-two scenes—those that relate the Gretchen tragedy alone having any necessary connection with each other. All the successive parts, including the Gretchen tragedy, suggest improvisation under a compelling immediate impulse with no reference to what had gone before or what might come after. Apart from its poetic value, therefore, the *Urfaust* is the concentrated expression of what had most intensely engaged Goethe's mind and heart previous to the period when it was produced.

In the *Urfaust* we have neither the Prologue in the Theatre nor the Prologue in Heaven, but, with the exception of some verbal changes, the opening scene which introduces us to Faust is identical with that of the poem in its final form. Seated at his desk in a dusty Gothic chamber, furnished with all the apparatus for scientific experiment, Faust reviews his past life, and finds that he has been mocked from the beginning. In every department of boasted knowledge he has made himself a master, but it has brought satisfaction neither to his intellect nor to his heart, and he has turned to magic in the hope that it would reveal to him the secrets that would make life worth living. As in the completed *Faust*, he opens the book of Nostradamus and finds the signs of the Macrocosmus and of the Earth-Spirit, by both of which he is baffled in his attempt to enter the *arcana* of being.

In the *Urfaust*, also, we have, with a few verbal alterations, the scene in which Faust communicates to his famulus Wagner his cynical view of the value of human knowledge. In the *Urfaust*, however, are lacking the scenes that follow in the completed poem—Faust's soliloquy and meditated suicide, the Easter walk, the appearance of Mephistopheles in the shape of a poodle, and the compact that follows. In place of these scenes we have but one, in which Mephistopheles, without previous introduction, is represented as a professor giving advice to a raw student who has come to consult him as to his future course of conduct and study. Of all the scenes in the *Urfaust* this is the feeblest, and its immaturity, as well as its evident references to Goethe's own experiences at Leipzig, suggest that it was the earliest written. This scene is followed by another reminiscent of Leipzig—the scene in Auerbach's cellar, which mainly differs from the later form in being written in prose and not in verse—Faust and not Mephistopheles playing the conjurer in drawing wine from a table. In the completed poem we are next introduced to the Witches' Kitchen, where Faust is rejuvenated, and where he sees Margaret's image in a mirror—the reader being thus prepared for the tragedy that is to follow. In the *Urfaust* we pass with no connecting link from the scene in Auerbach's Cellar to Faust's meeting with Margaret and the successive scenes which depict her self-abandonment to Faust and her consequent misery and ruin. The content of these scenes is virtually the same in both forms—the most important difference being that, while the concluding Prison Scene is in prose in the *Urfaust*, it is in verse in the later form. Of the three songs which Margaret sings, only the first, "There was a King in Thule," was retouched. In the *Urfaust* the duel between Valentin and Mephistopheles does not occur, and we have only Valentin's soliloquy on the ruin of his sister; and the scenes, *Wald und Höhle*, the *Walpurgis*

*Nacht*, the *Walpurgisnachtstraum*, generally condemned by critics as inartistic irrelevancies, are likewise lacking.<sup>1</sup>

The *Urfaust* is the crowning poetic achievement of the youthful Goethe, and by general consent, as has already been said, he never again achieved a similar intense fusion of thought, feeling, and imagination. Apart from the opening scenes, which have no dramatic connection with it, the Gretchen tragedy constitutes an artistic whole which by its perfection of detail and overwhelming tragic effect must ever remain one of the marvels of creative genius. Not less astonishing as a manifestation of Goethe's youthful power is the creation in all their essential lineaments of the three figures, Faust, Mephistopheles, and Margaret—figures stamped ineffaceably on the imagination of educated humanity. Be it said also that from the *Urfaust* mainly come those single lines and passages which are among the memorable words recorded in universal literature. Such, to specify only a few, are the Song of the Earth-Spirit; the lines commenting on man's vain endeavour to comprehend the past, and on the dreariness of all theory,<sup>2</sup> contrasted with the freshness and colour of life; Faust's confession of his religious faith, and Margaret's songs. To have added in this measure to the intellectual inheritance of the race assures the testator his rank among the great spirits of all time.

With the *Urfaust*, marking as it does the highest development which Goethe attained in the years of his youth, these years may fitly be passed in review. His characteristics as they present themselves during the period are certainly in strange contrast to the conception of the matured Goethe which holds general possession of the public mind, at least in this country. In that conception the world was for

<sup>1</sup> The words "[Sie] ist gerettet" are not in the *Urfaust*.

<sup>2</sup> Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,  
Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.



the later Goethe "a palace of art," in which he moved—

"as God holding no form of creed  
But contemplating all."<sup>1</sup>

But such transformations of human character are not in the order of nature, and, due allowance made for the numbing hand of time, the youthful Goethe remained essentially the same Goethe to the end. Behind the mask of impassivity which chilled the casually curious who sought him in his last years, there was ever that *etwas weibliches* which Schiller noted in him in his middle age. In the critical moments of life he was in his maturity as in his youth subject to emotions which for the time seemed to be beyond his control. On the death of his wife his behaviour was that of one distracted. He described himself at the age of fifteen as "something of a chameleon," and, as already remarked, Felix Mendelssohn, who saw him a year before his death, declared that the world would one day come to believe that there had been not one but many Goethes. We have seen that throughout the period of his youth some external impulse to production was a necessity of his nature, and so it was to the close. What Behrisch and Merck and his sister Cornelia did for him in these early years, had to be done for him in later life by similar friends and counsellors. If, like Plato and Dante, he was "a great lover" in his youth, "a great lover" he remained even into time-stricken age; when past his seventieth year he was moved by a passion from which, as in youth, he found deliverance by giving vent to it in passionate verse. It is in the youthful Goethe, before time and circumstance had dulled the spontaneous play of feeling, that we see the man as he came from nature's hand, with all his manifold gifts, and with all his sensuous impulses, tossed from one object of desire to another, yet ever held in check by the passion that was deepest in him—the passion to know and to create.

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson disclaimed having Goethe in his mind when he wrote *The Palace of Art*.

## CHAPTER XV

### FIRST MONTHS IN WEIMAR

NOVEMBER, 1775—JUNE, 1776

GOETHE'S settlement in Weimar in his twenty-sixth year is one of the decisive events in the lives of the world's great men. In a remarkable passage he has himself noted the moulding influence of forms of government on the individuals who live under them. "No one," he says, "denies the influence of physico-climatic conditions on the formation of man's mental build and bodily characteristics, but we do not always remember that forms of government also produce a moral climate in which characters are differently developed." "Of the rank and file of men," he adds, "I am not speaking, but of distinguished individuals, who count." That Goethe was thinking of himself when he wrote these words we can hardly doubt; a more notable illustration of the influence to which he refers could not be adduced than in his own case. On his outer and inner man alike the "moral climate" of Weimar imprinted such a stamp that in our mental picture of him we cannot dissociate the man and the place.

Previous to his settlement in Weimar Goethe's dominant characteristic had been his impressionability to his immediate surroundings. "I am a chameleon," so he had described himself. Under the influence of his home, as he tells us, he had grown up "a little, odd, coddled boy." Sent to the University of Leipzig at the age of seventeen, as the result of a residence of nearly three years in that "little Paris" he became a gay youth, a fop in dress, and something of a Don

Juan in his ways. With health seriously impaired by his free living, he had returned to Frankfort, and there under the solicitous attentions of a group of pious women he had sought solace in a form of mystical religion. In his twenty-first year he had gone to the University of Strassburg, where he found himself in still another atmosphere. His chief acquaintances in Strassburg were medical students, and a few months' intercourse with their society had sufficed to turn him from religion and make him a freethinker. During the four years he spent at home after his return from Strassburg his "chameleon" nature had taken on fresh tints from his immediate associations. As the result of his contact with the ladies of the Court of Darmstadt he became inoculated with the new cult of sensibility made current by Richardson and Rousseau, and in *Werther* he had given to the world its classical expression. *Werther* he described as "a general confession," expressly written to relieve himself from morbid emotions. Such had been his mental history in the past, and in the future it was not to be greatly dissimilar.

It was at the acutest crisis of his past career that he had decided to accept the invitation of Carl August to visit his Court at Weimar. The conflict of emotions occasioned by his relations to Lili Schöne-mann had reached its climax and he had come to the final decision that they must "play their rôles apart." In the circumstances both his father and himself felt that it was imperative that he should leave Frankfort for a time. There had been two alternatives before him. His father's wish had been that he should proceed to Italy and extend his experience by an acquaintance with that country and its treasures; and there was the invitation of Carl August to visit Weimar. He preferred Weimar to Italy, and there were deep grounds in his nature for the preference. In Italy he would have enriched his knowledge, widened and purified his taste—inducements powerful with Goethe at every period of his life. But



Weimar offered inducements which made a still more powerful appeal to him. In Goethe's estimation the highest attainment for man was the art of life—the art which gives ease and confidence in intercourse with one's fellows, a grace and dignity which are the expression of an assured inner harmony. But, as Goethe himself frequently said, this art of life could be acquired in only one order of society in the Germany of his day—in the circle of the nobility, and, as his mother told him, he was by nature, in the most essential meaning of the word, a *Freiherr*.

There were doubtless other motives that determined him in his preference of Weimar. We know that he was flattered by the invitation of the Duke and by the prospect of being received as his friend and guest. "I am brother and all to a prince," he proudly wrote to his mother some months after his settlement at the Weimar Court. To the Duke, also, he was strongly attracted from the first, and, as their lifelong friendship was to prove, there was a mutual attraction, based on a clear insight into each other's character.<sup>1</sup> The prospect of strengthening the bond between them, therefore, was another inducement that would influence Goethe's decision. But, knowing as we do Goethe's master passion from the beginnings of his intellectual life—the passion to develop all the powers that had been bestowed on him,—we cannot doubt that his prime motive in accepting the Duke's invitation was the opportunity it offered to him of intercourse with a society which would bring him nearer to a central view of life. Long afterwards, when past middle age, he wrote these words which have an evident application to himself: "At a Court, in intimacy with the great, there opens up to him [the poet] an outlook on the world which he needs in order to master the richness of all the materials offered to him."

Apart from the Court, Weimar had not many attractions to offer. Its environs were tame—tame

<sup>1</sup> They had met thrice before Goethe's going to Weimar.

compared with those of Frankfort and Strassburg with which Goethe was familiar. The Park, the chief attraction of the place at the present day, did not exist at the date of Goethe's arrival. With a population of about 7000, it was, as Herder said, neither a town nor a village. Externally and internally it had preserved the characteristics of the Middle Ages. It was surrounded by the ruins of walls, crowned at intervals by four towers. The town could only be entered by the gates, and no one, not even the courtiers, was allowed ingress without signing his name at the Guard-house. The inhabitants lived a life of drowsy routine, as they had neither trade nor commerce, and gained their subsistence from the neighbouring fields.

The Court itself, as it had been regulated before Goethe's arrival, was not a place where Goethe would have found himself at home. Under the *régime* of the Duke's mother, the Duchess Amalia, it was reputed the most pleasant and decorous in Germany. But, though she was herself a woman of original character and unconventional ways, the tradition of German Courts, which had taken their model from the Versailles of Louis XIV., dominated all its arrangements. A solemn etiquette regulated the actions of all who were attached to it. The more distinguished persons in the Court seldom appeared in public, and, when they did, they must be attended by a servant. A slow and measured pace was imperative, swift walking being regarded as unbecoming. When a townsman met a courtier, he stood still and made his obeisance. Any breach of propriety was regarded with disfavour both by the Court and the town, and, though under the young Duke's rule a revolution in tone and manners was effected, the majority still clung to their traditional notions. When the Duke cut his hair short, it sent a shock through the community, and his failure to attend divine service gave rise to severe comment. The religious opinions of Herder, whom Goethe was

instrumental in installing as Court preacher, were regarded with grave suspicion, and he was censured as being the first of his profession to wear dark clothes instead of black, to dispense with a peruke, to attend the theatre occasionally, to appear on the ice, and not seldom to ride at too hot a pace.<sup>1</sup>

Such had been the characteristics of the Court and town of Weimar when the Duke, a few weeks before Goethe's advent, took his place as ruler of the State. Goethe's coming, it may be said, was an event in the annals of human culture. For Germany it marks an epoch in her national development, and for humanity at large it was to make Weimar one of the intellectual shrines at which it will continue to pay homage for all time. At the moment his arrival was a portent for Weimar and its Court. Just a year before had appeared his *Werther*, which had made him the most famous author in Germany and opened up a new world of ideas and sentiments—a revelation of horror to one part of the nation, of ecstatic delight to another. For the great majority in Weimar, both in Court and town, *Werther* was an outrage on society, an offence against the laws of God and man, and it was with dismay that they saw its author the honoured friend and guest of their youthful prince.

The three chief persons with whom Goethe was to be associated in Weimar were the Dowager Duchess Amalia, the mother of Carl August, Carl August himself, and his wife, the Duchess Luise. Favourable and unfavourable contemporary observers agree in describing the Duchess Amalia as a remarkable woman. She came of the House of Brunswick, and was a niece of Frederick the Great, to whom, in both person and mind, she bore a striking resemblance. Married at the age of seventeen to Ernst Augustine Constantine, Duke of Weimar, she was left a widow with two infant children after two years'

<sup>1</sup> Lyncker, *Am Weimarischen Hofe unter Amalien und Karl August*, Berlin, 1913, p. 68.



marriage. During seventeen years the administration of the Duchy devolved upon her, and she discharged her task in a manner that won the admiration of her uncle Frederick. She not only directed her attention to the maintenance of public order and the material well-being of her subjects, but made it her express aim to raise their intellectual level. She gave special encouragement to the University of Jena, a place where Goethe subsequently found indispensable seclusion from the distractions of Weimar. In Weimar itself she did her utmost to further the interests of literature, music, and the theatre. One step that she took reveals both her tastes and her independence of character. She selected Wieland as tutor to her eldest son Carl August—a choice which shocked the feelings of many about the Court, as a poet, and a poet of Wieland's easy notions regarding human relations, seemed hardly a suitable instructor for a young prince. Yet it is the testimony of Goethe that her calling of Wieland initiated the intellectual movement which was to make Weimar a centre of light and leading for the German nation. For, in contrast to her uncle Frederick, who had eyes only for French models in art and literature, it was the German genius and its possibilities that interested her, and which she made it her object to foster. With abounding vitality and wide human interests she gave herself as energetically to pleasure as to business, and her jointure-palace in Weimar and her Schloss at the neighbouring Tiefurt were centres where persons of all tastes might find amusement or edification. In Goethe's mother she found a kindred spirit, and their correspondence reveals the genial spontaneity of both.<sup>1</sup> Be it added that there was a strain of coarseness in her nature which she shared with her uncle, and which was also apparent in her son Carl August. It was this trait in her and a certain commonness in her general character that

<sup>1</sup> Goethe's mother said of the Duchess that "she was born to be a blessing to mankind."

repelled Schiller, to whom she appears to have been wholly antipathetic.

The association of Duke Carl August and Goethe, which was to last for over half a century, is one of the memorable human relations recorded in history. The permanent tie about to be formed between the Duke and the burgher's son is a signal proof of the natural magnanimity of both. Their relation to each other was not that of patron and dependent; it was rather that of co-equals, each the first in his respective sphere. The circumstances in which the bond was maintained were such as would have rendered it impossible for inferior natures. The genius and commanding personality of Goethe, the place he came to hold in the eyes of Weimar and the world at large, would have excited the jealousy of a ruler of less noble nature than the Duke. The position of Goethe, also, had its own difficulties which only his large view of life could have enabled him to overcome. A commoner moving in a circle which was generally disposed to regard him as an upstart and an interloper, he lived in an atmosphere which, on his own frequent testimony, was essentially antipathetic to him. Both, it has to be added, were men of naturally passionate tempers and of variable humours, not disposed to be uniformly patient with the individuality of others. The conclusion is that each saw in the other the complement of himself, and that it was good for themselves and the world that they should go hand in hand through life. A discernor of spirits, as he was from his earliest youth, Goethe had, like Frederick the Great, seen from their first intercourse the promise of the boy-prince. What he found in him was *character*, a term which in Goethe's conception stood for everything that should be looked for in the individual man. Moreover, he found in Carl August's nature certain analogies with his own. In the case of both there was the same superabundant vitality, the same passionate desire to drain life to the full. But in Carl August as in Goethe there

existed, along with this "tumult of the soul," *des Lebens ernstes Führen*, which with years was in the case of both to conduct to self-mastery and concentrated purpose. It was, also, no mere boyish fancy that attached Carl August to Goethe. No doubt he found in him one who could enter into his youthful vivacities—a sympathy made all the more attractive by the fact that Goethe was eight years his senior.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it is evident that he saw the great and serious side of Goethe's character and genius, his considerate reflection underlying his explosive temperament. In Goethe's poem, *Ilmenau*, written seven years after his settlement in Weimar, we have the final expression of their mutual relations, and no nobler memorial of independent friendship between prince and subject is recorded in history.

The third exalted personage was the Duchess Luise, who, as the bride of Carl August, had settled in Weimar just three weeks before the arrival of Goethe. She was only eighteen, but she had a character and tastes of her own, which made her an alien in the society of the Court as the Duke was to transform it. Her mother was the Landgravine Caroline of Darmstadt, who had been the centre of that circle of sentimental women to which Goethe acknowledged a forwarding influence on his culture, and she had had Merck, its leading light, as one of her tutors. She had resided with her sister at the Court of Russia, and had there acquired notions of etiquette and of relations to inferiors which she saw systematically scouted in the daily conduct of her husband. The formal ways she brought with her corresponded with her temperament, for with real tenderness of heart and nobility of character she could never break through a natural reserve that checked spontaneous intercourse.<sup>2</sup> Such as she was, she was

<sup>1</sup> Zimmerman, who saw them together in Frankfort, says, "In Frankfurt sah ich mit eignen Augen dass der Herzog ganz in Goethe verliebt war, und er hat recht."

<sup>2</sup> The comment of Napoleon on her bearing to him, when he took possession of the Schloss at Weimar, is a significant tribute to her. "That is a woman," he said, "whom our cannon cannot daunt."



repelled by the Duke's boisterous ways, and they remained in imperfect sympathy to the end. Goethe she long regarded as his evil genius, and during his first years in Weimar they only exchanged "glances and syllables." In time, however, she came to see her error, and to regard Goethe as a prop to herself and an ornament to the Court. She was among the few in Weimar who took a sympathetic view of his irregular relations with Christiane Vulpius, as did his own mother. On his part, he from the first regarded her with esteem and even with reverence. It was with genuine concern that he saw the estrangement between her and the Duke, and, so far as was in his power, he did his best to effect a better understanding between them.

It was ostensibly as a guest on a visit of longer or shorter duration that Goethe came to Weimar. Yet there may have been a tacit understanding between the Duke and him that the visit might result in a more permanent arrangement. Early during his stay we find him weighing the alternatives of going or remaining. The considerations that eventually determined his decision to make Weimar his permanent home throw light at once on his character and on his aims. He found in Weimar a sphere of practical and responsible work, the lack of which in the past, as he fully realized, had not been for his good. Nowhere else was he likely to find occupation so consonant with his tastes and with his conception of his own personal claims. The other consideration was likewise one which we should naturally expect to have influenced his decision. At every stage of his development a woman had been the source and stimulus of his emotional experience and of his creative activity. "I cannot go on long without a passion," he wrote in his twenty-third year. As he had finally broken with Lili Schönemann, he was now without a passion, and he was open to the experience of another. He had not been long in Weimar before he met a woman, who by her gifts

and personal qualities was such as his riper manhood required to satisfy the demands of both his mind and his heart. It was quite in keeping with his past that he should regard the opportunity of intercourse with such a woman as a kind chance provided by destiny to determine between the alternatives that lay before him.

"We were all young and merry then," was Goethe's later comment on his earlier years in Weimar. Had Goethe never appeared in Weimar, we may believe that the young Duke, now his own master, would have run much the same course as he did with Goethe by his side. He needed no stimulus to follow his bent, yet his pleasures would have lost much of their savour had Goethe not shared them. In every society in which Goethe had hitherto found himself he had been the dominating and inspiring spirit, and so it was in the courtly circle of Weimar. The most remarkable event of the new *régime*, says one who was a Court page at the time, was the coming of Dr. Goethe. His notoriety as the author of *Werther* was a sensational introduction to a German Court, and the man Goethe more than fulfilled any expectations of what a genius should be like. His magnificent personal appearance; his modes of speech, regardless of conventional usage and pointed by audacious sallies; his demeanour defiant of all etiquette, made him a unique apparition at a German Court. Moreover, according to general testimony he was "a good fellow," of easy approach and responsive to the mood of his company.<sup>1</sup> There was one person in Weimar to whose reception of him he must have looked forward with some uneasiness. It was the poet Wieland, whose play *Alceste* he had wickedly made a jest of in his *Götter, Helden und Wieland*. They met immediately on Goethe's arrival, and Goethe's conquest of him was complete. Henceforward,

<sup>1</sup> Zimmermann speaks of Goethe's "bonhomie infiniment aimable." The children about the Weimar Court, with whom Goethe was a great favourite, called him "the good Doctor."

whenever Wieland had occasion to mention Goethe, it was in terms of hyperbolical laudation. His soul, he wrote, was as full of Goethe as a dewdrop of the morning sun; and, after a few months' intercourse, he described him as "the greatest, best, most magnificent human being whom God has created."

Wieland had reason to be impressed by the personality of the burgher's son, for it was very soon apparent that Goethe gave the tone to the Court. "Goethe lives, and does just as he pleases, and dispenses rain and sunshine," so Wieland sums up his impression of him after the lapse of five months. It was the same wild youth who at Leipzig and Strassburg was the soul of every company; and he gave as free vent to his whims and humours in the society of the Court as he had done in these places. He and the Duke, we are told, were "inseparable." They frequently slept in the same bedroom and dined at the same table. Etiquette was thrown to the winds. The Duke was attended in the palace by his hunting-dogs, occasionally to the discomfort of other inmates. Goethe appeared at Court unannounced, and his salutation was a nod of the head instead of the customary formal obeisance. It was the Duke's order that the men should appear in the costume of Werther; if any one appeared without it, he was presented with a suit. It was "youth on the prow and pleasure at the helm," and both in Weimar and outside it sober persons regarded the Duke as on the high-road to ruin and Goethe as showing him the way. The dissipations specially noted were nightly pleasure-parties at the Court, practical jokes, flirtations with the ladies, and skating at late hours, in all which amusements neither delicacy nor decorum was scrupulously regarded; hunting, wild rides through the country, in which the Duke met with more than one accident; and (still a tradition in the neighbourhood) doubtful pranks with country girls played by the noble youths disguised as swains. The patriarch of Germany, Klopstock, who had sown his own wild



oats in his day, deemed it his duty to send Goethe a letter of admonition, but the reply was such as to end their further intercourse.<sup>1</sup>

The part that Goethe was playing in Weimar was exactly what his past would have led us to expect. In whatever society he had hitherto found himself he had taken on its hue. In Weimar he found a young prince surrounded by kindred spirits, bent on riotous pleasure, and characteristically he threw himself into the life of the moment. As has been said, Carl August would have gone his own way had he never seen Goethe, though, doubtless, the place of Goethe could have been filled by no other. But now, as in all his past relations, Goethe had an inner life which was not visible to the world. Both from himself and from those who had the discernment to see it we know that in the "sledge-drive," to which he compared his life in those days, he never lost his bearings. At every period of his career, times of seclusion were a necessity of his nature, and he found opportunity for such seasons even amid his present distractions. He was a frequent guest of Wieland, who wrote: "In my house he is like one of ourselves. With us he again breathes rest and love, and so is helped to hold out in the whirlwind in which he lives." A gift of the Duke showed their mutual understanding. In March, 1776, he purchased a modest house on the banks of the Ilm, with a little garden attached to it, and presented it to Goethe. In this abode, known as the *Gartenhaus*, which still stands in the Park at Weimar, the poet was to pass the most treasured hours of his life, and he guarded its seclusion with a jealous care which was only relaxed in the case of one favoured person. "It is a glorious sensation," he wrote immediately after taking possession, "to sit at home in one's own garden."

<sup>1</sup> In 1782 Goethe wrote as follows regarding his first years in Weimar: "Es ist mir immer erfreulich, wenn ich sehe dass die Unarten meiner vorigen Zeiten keinen so übeln Eindruck bei den Menschen zurückgelassen haben als ich wohl verdient hätte."

Gradually, indeed, as the whirling weeks went by, Goethe found that he was forming ties in Weimar which it was not desirable that he should break. In the midst of their madcap pranks the Duke and he had their serious moments. Two months after his arrival we find him sitting as a guest at the Duke's council-table and taking an active part in the business of the duchy. "I am now quite immersed in Court and political business," he wrote to Merck in January, 1776, "and will scarcely be able again to break away from this place. My position has its advantages, and the Duchies of Weimar and Eisenach are, at any rate, a stage for trying what it would be like to play a part in the great world." That he was making himself felt in public affairs is proved by an interesting fact. The office of Court preacher was vacant, and Goethe set his heart on securing the post for Herder. He persuaded the Duke that Herder would be a desirable acquisition for Weimar, but Herder's theological speculations were well known, and to the majority of the Duke's advisers his coming would mean that another revolutionary would be at their patron's ear. Supported by the Duchess Amalia, however, Goethe carried his point, and Herder was appointed to the vacant post.

The prospect of a sphere of action, such as he was not likely to find elsewhere, was one influence that disposed Goethe to a more settled footing in Weimar. But, as has already been noted, there was another influence at work on him which materially affected his final decision. Before he had been many months in Weimar he entered into relations with the woman to whom, along with Shakespeare, he ascribes the most potent influence on his development.<sup>1</sup> The period of her influence lasted for eleven years, and that period covered the portion of a man's life when mind and character take their definitive form. He

<sup>1</sup> "Lida! Glück der nächsten Nähe,  
William! Stern der schönsten Höhe,  
Euch verdank' ich, was ich bin."

Lida is Frau von Stein.



*Charlotte von Stein*

FRAU VON STEIN.

[Facing p. 230.]





was twenty-six when their intimacy began, and he was thirty-eight when the bond between them was broken.

The lady was Charlotte von Stein, the wife of Baron von Stein, Master of the Horse at the Court of Weimar. She had nearly completed her thirty-first year when Goethe met her, and was thus five years his senior. She was the mother of seven children, of whom three sons survived and four daughters had died. Her marriage had been uncongenial, as her husband was equally lacking in character and in intelligence, and found his main interest in the stables. It was a woman with such a past, fragile in health and prone to depression, who cast over the youth of twenty-six a spell which, by his own confession, left him hardly a free agent. What was the magic of the charm which, if we are to believe himself, made her a necessity of his being throughout all these years? The attraction, we can see, lay in the contrast at once between the conditions of their past and between their respective types of character and temperament. He was the son of a bourgeois and had lived in the atmosphere of a bourgeois; she was a baroness, and was, moreover, a rare product of her class. The general impression she made is described as "elegant simplicity"—speech, appearance, manner, and dress all contributing to produce the effect. From descriptions of her by contemporaries we know how she looked and bore herself. She was of the middle height, slight and graceful in figure, which, we are told, showed to advantage in skating and dancing. Like Goethe's, her eyes were dark and her complexion rich brown, and it is noted that her features also had a certain resemblance to his. It was in keeping with her character that she preferred to dress in white. All these characteristics appealed to the instincts of Goethe, for whom distinction in any form was always an attraction, whether in man or in woman. He was magnetized, also, by a temperament which was in strong contrast to his own. Volatility, susceptibility, spontaneity in the expression of all he felt were the

notes of his nature which were remarked by all who even casually met him. On the other hand, partly from nature and partly as the result of a depressing past, her reserve was such that it suggested an incapacity for warm human relations. Schiller, who did not always agree with Goethe in his estimate of persons, thus describes her: "She is a really remarkable, interesting person, and I quite understand what has attached Goethe to her. Beautiful she can never have been, but her countenance has a soft earnestness and a quite peculiar openness. A healthy understanding, truth, and feeling are inherent in her nature." In this description of her by Schiller we may see what it was in her that fascinated Goethe. She possessed two characteristics which specially interested him—individuality and a mind that naturally took in the facts of life without illusions. Be it added that she was the only woman in Weimar capable of understanding him and with whom he could have satisfying intellectual intercourse.

They were interested in each other before they met, and the bond that was to unite them seemed almost predestined. Among a number of silhouettes shown to him by Zimmermann and intended for Lavater's book on Physiognomy, hers had specially attracted his attention, and he wrote these words beneath it: "It would be a glorious spectacle to observe how the world is reflected in this soul." And Zimmermann further remarks in the same letter to herself that his account of her to Goethe had so perturbed him as to rob him of his sleep for three successive nights. In a letter to Lavater, also, Goethe noted the characteristics which the portrait suggested to him, and closed them with the remark, which his experience was to verify, that she "conquers with nets." In the case of the lady there was the same fluttering expectation in view of their meeting. She had read his books, and Zimmermann had told her of Goethe's interest in her, adding that for a woman's heart he was "the most dangerous of men."



She was at the neighbouring family estate of Kochberg when Goethe arrived in Weimar, but on her return a few days later the Duke introduced him to her at her own house. Of their relations during these first months we have one record in Goethe's letters to various friends as well as to herself. The other record is contained in her letters to Zimmermann, who had been the means of making them known to each other. Taken together, the two records present a sufficiently vivid picture of an intercourse necessarily rendered delicate by the relations of the two parties, and of the meeting of two souls, naturally antagonistic at so many points.

In the opening of January, 1776, began their correspondence, which, on Goethe's side, was to extend to nearly 1800 letters before it was closed. The first of his letters to her which we possess shows that he was bent on claiming more than mere friendship from her; hers, he tells her, is the only love which does not torture him. And the letters that follow display all the impatience and irritability of passion. In interpreting them we have doubtless to remember the effusiveness of the time and the fact that in writing to other women Goethe was in the habit of using exaggerated language,<sup>1</sup> yet after all reserves the letters leave us in no doubt that his emotions were dangerously engaged. "Thou only one among women"; "let no one see my letters"; "if I can hold any one dearer, I will tell you": such are some of the expressions he permits himself to use to the wife of another. What further shows that he had not complete control of himself is that she was embarrassed and even alarmed by his insistence. "Forgive me that I make you suffer; in future I will try to bear it alone"; "I can do nothing but love you silently"; "I thank you that you are so much kinder to me than I deserve": such language does not proceed from the misunderstandings of mere friendship, and, when we turn to the words

<sup>1</sup> In Goethe's letters to the Countess von Stolberg at this period we have specimens of this kind of language.

of the lady herself, we find its speaking commentary.

It is only for the beginning of Frau von Stein's relations with Goethe that we have her testimony, as on their eventual breach she demanded back her letters to him and destroyed them. In three letters addressed to Zimmermann she describes Goethe's conduct to her, and at the same time gives us a picture of the man as she saw him. The first describes a scene between them which throws light on his own words just quoted. Calling on her one night, he found her alone, and in the course of their conversation he began familiarly to address her as his *Herzens-Du*. In the softest tones she reprimanded him for the liberty and pointed out its impropriety. Thereupon he rose from the couch on which he was sitting, ran wildly up and down the room in search of his stick, and, failing to find it, rushed out of the house without saying good night. So embarrassing, indeed, was his demeanour to her that on one occasion she refused to accompany the Dowager Duchess to Wieland's house because she had learned that Goethe was to be there. In the same letter in which she makes this remark, she gives an estimate of the man which shows how fully she comprehended his strength and his weakness. "This is all I have to say of Goethe," she wrote, "of the man who has head and heart among a thousand, who sees all things so clearly and with open mind as soon as he pleases, who can become master in all he undertakes. I feel that Goethe and I will never become friends." She added that she disliked his manner of associating with her sex. It seemed to her frivolous and lacking in proper respect.

It was in these uneasy alternations of repulsion and attraction that they stood to each other, and the question was which was to be the dominating spirit. Both, in letters to their respective friends, acknowledged that they were under a spell. "I cannot," wrote Goethe to Wieland, "I cannot explain to myself the significance of this woman, and the power which she



PORTRAIT OF FRAU V. STEIN (REPUTED).

[Facing p. 234.]





has over me, otherwise than through metempsychosis.<sup>1</sup> Surely, we were once husband and wife." On her part Frau von Stein writes thus to Zimmermann: "As you see, through our dear friend Goethe I have come to write in German, and I am grateful to him for it; what will he yet make of me?" From the beginning to the end of their relations there was to be a conflict of wills, and, as neither would wholly surrender to the other, the breach was sooner or later bound to come.

We see the inducements which finally determined Goethe to strike his roots in Weimar. He saw before him a career of practical usefulness such as he was not likely to find anywhere else. Experience was to teach him that his true sphere of activity lay not in the world of practical life, but in the domain of thought and artistic creation.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, however, he was tempted by the prospect of doing some good service to the land and people of the Duchy, whose unsatisfactory condition he had already keenly observed. The other inducement was to see and feel how the world was mirrored in the soul of Frau von Stein. Nor were the two interests incompatible. It was the serious side of Goethe in which she was interested, and she had seen what others had been unable to see—that in apparently abandoning himself to the Duke's humours he had a distinct end in view. She had serious talk with him regarding his wild courses, but at the same time she told Zimmermann that she did not attach much importance to them. "He must go on for a while so," she wrote, "in order to humour the Duke, and then bring about some good." Be it added that it was in her house that the Duke and Goethe frequently met and discussed their plans for business as well as for pleasure.

By the close of February, 1776, he regarded himself

<sup>1</sup> In some lines addressed to her he expresses the same sentiments:

"Ach, du warst, in abgelebten Zeiten,  
Meine Schwester oder meine Frau."

<sup>2</sup> After six years spent in official duties he wrote: "Eigentlich bin ich zum Schriftsteller geboren."

as permanently settled in Weimar. On the 14th of that month he wrote to a correspondent as follows: "I shall probably remain here and play my part as well as I can, and as long as it pleases fate and myself. Were it only for a couple of years, it is always better than my indolent life at home, where I can be perfectly happy doing nothing. Here I have two Duchies before me." A fortnight later he told the same correspondent that he had no choice but to remain. On April 22, as we have seen, the Duke presented him with the *Gartenhaus* as a permanent residence, and a further proceeding of the Duke sealed their mutual understanding. On June 11, to the dismay of his older Councillors and to the merriment of the Court in general,<sup>1</sup> he appointed the author of *Werther* and abettor of his pleasures *Geheimer Legationsrat*, with a seat and vote in the Council and an annual salary of 1200 thalers. Possibly Frau von Stein alone saw the significance of the Duke's action, and with her clear insight into Goethe's character and powers and her influence with the Duke she may even have been accessory to it.

<sup>1</sup> The courtiers gave the name *Poesia* to the horse which Goethe rode in the discharge of his official duties.—Lyncker, *op. cit.* p. 50, note.



## CHAPTER XVI

### GOETHE AS COUNCILLOR OF LEGATION

1776—1779

DURING the ten years which Goethe was now to spend in Weimar, it was mainly as a courtier and a state official that he stood before the world. Throughout that period, indeed, he produced a considerable amount in different departments of literature, and made a beginning with works which, subsequently completed, take rank among the most memorable of his writings. He also broke new ground as a student of physical science, and made one important discovery which has given him a permanent place in its annals. But, as an author, he produced nothing which attracted the attention of the world like *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werther*, and his work in science was known only to a few. For one or two persons, who had the insight to discern where his real strength lay, his preoccupations with practical affairs were merely regrettable distractions from his natural function, and it was for the possibilities of his genius and not for his actual work as an administrator that they regarded him as a personality of unique and absorbing interest. But in the world at large, both in Weimar and out of it, the general feeling was that the genius which had taken the nation by storm in *Götz* and *Werther* was either exhausted or under an eclipse.

The interest that belongs to this period of Goethe's career—an interest which at times has something tragic in it—is the conflict it presents between the calls of his deepest nature and the conditions in which

he had to develop it. Variable in his humours, as he always was, he frequently contradicts himself in his estimate of the position in which he found himself. At times he tells himself or his friends that he is "the luckiest of men" and that destiny could not have allotted him a more propitious sphere for his development than Weimar. But his inmost conviction, as he reveals it in moments of most serious reflection, is that his surroundings are essentially uncongenial and retarding to the special work to which nature called him. As the years passed, this conviction gradually deepened. Nobly and successfully though he devoted himself to his official duties, proudly confident though he was at times that his labours were attended by beneficent results both for the Duke and for his subjects, it was borne in upon him that the most important service he could perform for himself and the world lay in other spheres. The society in which he moved became more and more distasteful to him, and his frequent complaint to himself was that no one understood him. Without the inspiring sympathy which was a necessity of his nature, he was thrown back upon himself, with the result that in the later years of this period he lived in a state of strained isolation which made a change of conditions an imperative necessity.

It is in this double aspect of him that we find the peculiar interest that attaches to this period of his development. There was his external life as courtier and man of affairs, in which he stood before the world, open to its criticism in both capacities, and there was that inner life known only to himself, though occasionally revealed to one or other sympathetic friend. It was this inner life which was of supreme interest to himself as it is also to posterity. What is revealed in the record of it, is the picture of a soul and mind bent on achieving a harmony of all their powers, with the fixed purpose of bringing all the gifts allotted to them to bear on the problems of life and knowledge. By its fulness and its quality this record is probably unique in the history of the human spirit. No saint ever

more assiduously sought after spiritual perfection than Goethe in these years strove to attain the goal he set before himself. And, as in the case of the saint, we have the same exacting introspection, the same alternations of hope and despondency in the process of self-discipline. Be it said that the ideal after which Goethe strove was not that of the Christian saint. Goethe's ideal is expressed in a word, which, with its related roots, drops from his pen whenever he has occasion to refer to his serious inward life. This word, *Reinigkeit*, is one which has its place in the Christian vocabulary, but Goethe attaches to it a signification of his own. In a letter to Fritz Jacobi he expressed figuratively what it meant for him. "I have endured unspeakably," he wrote, "and am heartily glad that you follow my career with confidence. Let me make use of an illustration. When you see a glowing mass of iron on the forge, you do not conceive that it contains so much dross as is revealed when it is subjected to the hammer. Then the rubbish, which even the fire did not sunder, separates itself, becomes fluid, and is dispersed in glowing drops and sparks, and the pure metal remains in the workman's tongs. It seems as if such a mighty hammer had been necessary to free my nature from its many kinds of dross and to make my heart pure."<sup>1</sup> It is this process of self-purification, pursued with such persistency amid adverse conditions and against baffling impulses, that gives specific interest to these ten years of Goethe's life in Weimar.

So far as external events are concerned, these years may be divided into three periods. In June, 1776, as we have seen, he was appointed *Legationsrat*, with a seat and vote in Council—a position which he held till August, 1779, when he was made a Privy Councillor. During this period his public duties were neither onerous nor exacting; he had leisure for occasional journeys of longer or shorter duration; and much of his time was consumed in attending on the Duke in

<sup>1</sup> November 17, 1782.



the pursuit of his characteristic pleasures. On his appointment as Privy Councillor, business became his chief care, and he devoted himself to his duties with an ardour which told both on his health and on his spirits. The strain became greater when, in 1782, he was made President of the Council, and in the following years his life in Weimar from various causes grew so intolerable that in October, 1786, he had to seek refuge in flight as he had previously done from Frankfort in a similar state of mind.

The life led by Goethe during the three years following his first appointment to office shows that he enjoyed a large degree of personal freedom. The July and August which followed the appointment he spent at a spot to which, by ties of business or pleasure, he was to be strongly attracted for the rest of his life. It was the village of Ilmenau, about thirty miles from Weimar, lying at the eastern extremity of the Thuringian Forest. The attraction of the place was its solitude and its neighbouring hills and valleys, then as now clothed with pine woods. In close proximity to the village rises the Kickelhahn, the highest peak in the forest, from the summit of which there is a wide prospect of the surrounding country. In the silence of the woods that covered its slopes Goethe was to pass the most treasured days and weeks of his life, and, with the exception of Weimar itself, there is no spot more closely associated with the memories of his early manhood and later years. While for purposes of study and research he sought seclusion in the neighbouring town of Jena, it was at Ilmenau he found the repose which was a recurring necessity for him, and it was on a wall of the hunting-lodge, constructed by the Duke on the summit of the Kickelhahn, that he wrote the lines beginning "*Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,*" inspired by the contrast between the tumult of his own inward life and the peace breathed around him. With the same spot is also associated what is perhaps the most pathetic incident related of him. When for the last time, in the year before his



GOETHE ON THE GICKELHAIN IN 1831, ON THE SPOT WHERE HE  
HAD WRITTEN "UEBER ALLEN GIPFELN."

[Facing p. 240.]





death, and shortly after the death of the Duke, he visited the lodge, and read the lines he had inscribed so many years before, the memories they recalled overpowered him and he burst into tears. After Weimar, the pilgrim who desires to feel the spiritual presence of Goethe, will naturally turn his steps to the remote Thuringian village and its neighbouring hills and valleys, still a retreat in "the heart of peace."

Even during this visit he felt the charm of the place; here, he was sure, was a spot where he could be his own master, and live at peace with the world and with himself. But the two months were not wholly spent in poetic musing or self-recollection. He was in attendance on the Duke, who was accompanied by other young bloods of the Court, and the behaviour of the "brothers," as they called themselves, did not set an edifying example to the country folk of the neighbourhood. Hunting by day, mad pranks on all occasions, and nightly revelry in which sex and rank were ignored—such, according to tradition, were the amusements of the frolicsome party. While he no doubt joined in these antics, and was the wildest of the company, he contrived to live a life apart. In almost daily letters to Frau von Stein he tells her how he was spending his days. He was still obsessed by the notion, entertained from his early youth,—a notion in which she encouraged him—that he might one day achieve success in art. His daily occupation, therefore, was the sketching of scenes in his neighbourhood which at once would be personally interesting to her, and at the same time would make her the sharer of his deepest aspirations.

It was with spirit refreshed and with buoyant hope for the future that Goethe returned to Weimar in the beginning of September. His ties with the Duke were daily becoming closer, and he was cheered by a growing confidence that the prince would one day prove a worthy ruler. "The Duke and I," he wrote to Merck, "become every day dearer to each other; we are whole days together; he is continually improving, and

is, indeed, a unique creature."<sup>1</sup> His own life, also, he assured Merck, was all that he could desire. He lived in a "mad world," but he was not of it. His days were passed in his garden observing the seasons, the changes in the weather and in the world of people around him. In some remarkable lines written at the same period he gives passionate expression to the high resolve by which he was animated.<sup>2</sup> Under the similitude of a voyager on the high seas he pictures the hopes and fears of himself and his friends in Frankfort regarding his future career. Long days and nights the ship that was to convey him lay in haven awaiting favourable winds. The auspicious morning at length came, and the ship set sail amid the jubilations of his friends on shore. But baffling storms drove the vessel from its course, and his friends anxiously awaited his fate. But, he concludes, manfully he stands by the helm; winds and waves make sport with the ship, but not with his heart; with the confidence of command he views the grim depths, and places his faith in his gods, whether shipwreck or safe landing be his doom.

In carrying out the process of self-discipline, isolation from the society of the Court became more and more a necessity for him. Even Wieland, from whom he had formerly sought solace, had to complain of his growing reserve, and expressed the fear that he had lost his creative powers. It was to what Wieland calls his "painful relations" to Frau von Stein that he ascribes Goethe's changed manner and the eclipse of his genius, and in truth his absorption in her was now complete. In her alone in Weimar he had found one who with sympathy and intelligence could aid him in running the course he had set before him. Not a day passed but in talk or by brief notes he communicated to her the thoughts and feelings and occupations that were engaging him.

Yet he was still far from that self-mastery after

<sup>1</sup> November 22, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> September, 1776.

which he was striving. He could not wholly escape the distractions of his position, and the impulses of his many-sided nature led to moods of morbid self-questioning, in which he despaired of himself. In June, 1777, he received news of the death of his sister Cornelia. She had been the most intimate and sympathetic counsellor of his early youth, and he had been bound to her by ties of the strongest affection. But her death must have come as a relief to him. Her marriage had been unhappy from the beginning, and since his settlement in Weimar he had received letters from her revealing a state of mind which showed that life had become impossible for her. Hopeless himself of administering comfort to her, he had appealed to Frau von Stein to enter into correspondence with her. It was two years since he had seen her at her home in Emmendingen, and her place in his life had been taken by another. It was in words that may appear cold, therefore, that in a letter to his mother he makes reference to her death. "I can say nothing to you," he wrote, "except that fortune continues to show herself the same to me, that the death of my sister is all the more painful in that it surprises me in happy times. My feelings are but human, and I surrender myself to nature which permits us to feel violent grief only for a brief space, though sorrow enduringly."<sup>1</sup>

In the same month of June, in which his sister died, we have a glimpse of him in a scene that enables us to realize the part which he played in the Court circle, when he was pleased to enter it. The description of the scene is from the hand of the poet Ludwig Gleim, known as "Father Gleim" for his paternal goodness to struggling literary men. Gleim was on a visit to Weimar, and one evening he was invited to meet a company at the Duchess Amalia's. The object of

<sup>1</sup> June 28, 1777. At a later date in the same year (November 16) he wrote these words to his mother regarding the death of Cornelia: "Mit meiner Schwester ist mir so eine starke Wurzel die mich an der Erde heilt abgehauen worden, dass die Aeste, von oben, die davon Nahrung hatten, auch absterben müssen."



the gathering was to hear Gleim read some poems which had recently appeared. In the course of the evening the company was joined by a youth, booted and spurred, and dressed in a short green hunting tunic. During a pause in the reading this youth, remarkable by his "dark glancing Italian eyes," politely offered to take Gleim's place and relieve him from time to time. The offer accepted, the reader at first kept to the book, but suddenly he began to give forth matter that astonished the audience. In all forms of verse and in various dialects he poured forth a medley of thoughts and fancies, humorous, witty, and sublime, seasoning the whole with satire pointed at individuals present, Gleim among the rest. "That is either Goethe or the devil," Gleim remarked to Wieland, who was one of the company. "Both," was Wieland's reply.

Of all the men whom he had hitherto known, his former mentor Merck, was, according to Goethe, the only one who understood him. Merck alone among the friends from whom he had parted on his settlement in Weimar he had missed for congenial converse and plain-spoken counsel. It was a welcome event, therefore, when in September, 1777, an opportunity of renewing their intercourse presented itself. In that month the Duke took up his quarters at the Wartburg, near Eisenach, his principal residence in his Duchy of that name. As in the previous year at Ilmenau, his chief objects were hunting and shooting, and Goethe was one of the party that accompanied him. Though he could not wholly avoid his companions and their amusements, Goethe, as at Ilmenau, led a life apart. The persons about him, he wrote to Frau von Stein, had as little interest in him as he had in them. In the magnificent scenery of the Thuringian Forest that surrounded the Wartburg he passed his days, diligently sketching whenever the opportunity offered, though more and more convinced he would never become a master in the art.

A letter written from the Wartburg to Kestner,

the husband of Lotte Buff, now settled in Hanover, is an interesting commentary on his own views of life, and on the state of mind in which he now found himself. Kestner had asked his advice as to the desirability of his leaving Hanover. "You ask some counsel," Goethe wrote. "From a distance it is difficult to give it. But the safest, the truest, the most tried counsel is: remain where you are. Endure this or that discomfort, annoyance, or slight, etc., because you will find it no better elsewhere. Remain steadfast and faithful in your place. . . . Whoever changes his condition invariably loses the removal expenses, morally and economically, and gives himself a set back. . . . I am living in Luther's Patmos, and find myself in as good case as he. For the rest, I am the luckiest of all the men I know."<sup>1</sup>

The testimony of Merck, who spent about a fortnight with the company at the Wartburg, confirms Goethe's own account of his state of mind and of the favourable conditions in which he found himself. "His situation," Merck reported, "is the best he can wish for. He lives in the Duke's house quite as much after his own humour as if he were in mine. He has not at all lost his former poetic individuality as fools assert; on the other hand, he hungers and thirsts increasingly after the knowledge of men and the practice of affairs, and the wisdom and prudence that come therefrom. . . . Goethe loves the Duke as he does none of us, probably because no one needs him so much, and so their relation will be permanent."<sup>2</sup>

At the close of November, before the Duke's hunting party had broken up, Goethe was seized by one of those sudden impulses to which he was subject at all periods of his life. He would visit the country of the Harz mountains and ascend the Brocken in midwinter. There were other reasons, however, that prompted him to the journey. Both he and the Duke

<sup>1</sup> September 28, 1777.

<sup>2</sup> At a later date, as we shall see, Merck changed his opinion regarding Goethe's position in Weimar.

were interested in some mining operations at Ilmenau, and in the mines of the Harz country he would obtain hints for their future guidance. There was another motive for the expedition which has its own interest for the appreciation of Goethe's idiosyncrasies. He had recently received two letters from a stranger which had excited his curiosity. The correspondent was a young theologian, by name Plessing, residing in the Harz district, who, in a state of morbid melancholy, had appealed for solace to the author of *Werther* as a spiritual physician, skilled in the soul's perplexities. Goethe had answered neither of the letters, but it was one object of his journey to visit the patient.

On November 29, without a hint of his destination, either to the Duke or even to Frau von Stein, Goethe left Eisenach on his solitary journey.<sup>1</sup> He travelled *incognito*, and in the course of his wanderings was variously taken for a weaver, a painter, a law student, and an inquisitive tourist. "It gives me a strange feeling," he wrote from one of his halting-places to Frau von Stein, "to go about the world *incognito*; I feel as if it put me in far truer relations to men and affairs." At Wernigerode he paid his visit to his troubled correspondent Plessing, giving out that he came from Gotha and maintaining his *incognito* throughout the interview. To the emotions aroused by that talk he gave expression in some dithyrambic lines (*Harzreise im Winter*) which recall the mood of his *Werther* period. Their burden is that man is the creature of his destiny—he who is marked for misfortune struggles in vain against the adverse circumstances in which his lot is cast, while the favourite of fortune runs smoothly and swiftly to his joyful goal; and it is implied that in Plessing and himself the two different fates were exemplified.<sup>2</sup>

During his journey, which lasted over a fortnight, he encountered wintry storms at their worst, but, when

<sup>1</sup> He travelled on horseback with a valise.

<sup>2</sup> Plessing subsequently recovered his health of mind, and became a professor of philosophy of some distinction.



the weather permitted, he, as usual, sketched indefatigably. Chief among the pleasures of his wanderings was his intercourse with the mining community, with whom he mingled on terms of cordial familiarity. Goethe had as profound a belief in the virtues of toiling men as Wordsworth, and he was never more himself than when freely moving among them. "How much affection," he wrote to Frau von Stein, "have I once more gained on this mysterious expedition for that class of men who are called the lower, but who for God are certainly the highest! In them all the virtues are united—restraint, content, straightforwardness, fidelity, happiness in any little good that comes to them, innocence, long-suffering patience, perseverance in—but I will not lose myself in crying up their virtues."

It was in the teeth of difficulties that would have daunted a less enthusiastic wanderer that Goethe achieved the special object of his journey—the climbing of the Brocken. The people of the neighbourhood assured him that the attempt was impossible at that season of the year, and that, in point of fact, it had never been accomplished. The day of Alpine climbing, it is to be remembered, had not yet come. But in his solitude and amid the winter scenery of the Harz he was wrought up into a state of feverish exultation which finds strange expression in words he addressed at the time to Frau von Stein. On December 10 he wrote triumphantly to her that he had attained the goal of his desire. With much difficulty he had persuaded a forester to accompany him in the ascent of the Brocken, and he had at length stood on its summit<sup>1</sup> with "the whole world beneath him veiled in clouds and mist, and clear sky overhead." In moments of strong emotion Scripture texts naturally occurred to Goethe, and in his Diary he inscribed these words as giving utterance to his feelings on this occasion: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou

<sup>1</sup> On December 8, at midday.

visitest him?" After three days' further travelling in the Harz, he rejoined the Duke at Eisenach, whence they returned to Weimar.

On January 1, 1778, Goethe wrote these words in his Diary—*rein ruhig*. The words expressed the ideal after which he was striving, but, as the future was to show, he was still far from its permanent attainment. A tragic incident that happened in the course of the same month impressed on him the perils of unrestrained emotions which he had himself hitherto escaped, but to which he had unwittingly exposed others. A lady attached to the Court, Christel von Lassberg, drowned herself in the Ilm not far from Goethe's house. In her pocket was found a copy of *Werther*, and it was reported that the motive of her action was, as in Werther's case, disappointed love. The incident awoke in Goethe all those morbid feelings which were an element of his nature, and it was with something like obsession that he brooded on the details of the tragedy and took pains to commemorate it. "In silent sorrow engaged during some days about the scene of the death." So he wrote in his Diary, and he has these significant words in a letter to Frau von Stein; "like the water itself this seductive kind of grief has something dangerously alluring in it, and the light of the stars of heaven, which shines forth from both, attracts us."

In May of the same year he had a glimpse of a world such as he had not yet experienced. At that time there were threatened hostilities between Prussia and Austria, and the Duke of Weimar, as having a stake in eventualities, thought it necessary to visit Berlin. He was accompanied by Goethe, who for the first and last time was to see that city. His sensations during this visit were in curious contrast to his mood in the Harz journey of the previous year. "Quite another spectacle!" he wrote to Merck, and all his references to his visit show that he was out of sympathy with his surroundings. He observed all the things and persons that came before him with his

usual keen curiosity, but all he saw drove him in upon himself. In his heart he had a deep admiration for the great Frederick, but even in his references to Frederick his dissatisfied humour appears. "I was in quite close touch with old Fritz," he afterwards told Merck, "as I saw his mode of life, his gold, his silver, his marble, his apes, his parrots, his tattered curtains, and heard his hangers-on discuss the great man." Throughout his stay he deliberately assumed a cold and distant demeanour. "With men I had no close intercourse, and in Prussian territory uttered no audible word that could not be printed. Occasionally, therefore, I was reported to be proud, etc." The impressions he received of Berlin were abiding, and, though in later years he manifested a keen interest in its intellectual developments, as a community the Berliners remained repellent to him.

The object of Goethe's self-discipline was a cultivation of his heart and mind such as would most effectually enable him to do the best service to mankind. That he sought to develop his social feelings as well as his intellect, is interestingly illustrated in a correspondence which began in November, 1778. His correspondent, known to us only by the name of Kraft,<sup>1</sup> was one of those helpless beings whom we now recognize as belonging to the class of the "unemployables." He had received some education, but from inherent defect of will, he appears to have been hopelessly incapable of applying himself to any kind of work. Like the youth Plessing, already referred to, and like many others, Kraft appealed to Goethe as one who would understand him and might give him help and counsel. What apparently interested Goethe in Kraft was that with his helpless incapacity he showed a real sense of dissatisfaction with the life he was living. He responded at once to Kraft's appeal, and in a series of letters addressed to him, we see a kindly prudence, a delicate tact and consideration which can proceed only from the finest sympathy. From the first Goethe

<sup>1</sup> This was not his real name, which has remained undiscovered.



seems to have realized that he had to do with one with whom no human aid or counsel could avail. "I believe," he wrote, "that I am not deceived in the conception of you which I have formed from your letters, and what pains me most is that I can give neither hope nor help to one whose demands are so modest." In spite of this conviction, however, Goethe persisted till Kraft's death, seven years later, not only in endeavouring to cure his defects of character, but in supplying him with the means of subsistence. He sent him his own cast-off clothes, lent him books, gave him at one time fully a sixth of his own income, and first in Jena and afterwards in Ilmenau tried to find him employment to which he might be equal. Kraft's incurable querulousness would have worn out the patience of most men, but Goethe endured it with the interested sympathy of a spiritual confessor anxious about his convert. Kraft had expressed his sense of shame and regret that he was a burden on one on whom he had no right to make claims, and Goethe answered him as follows: "You are not a burden on me; rather it teaches me to economize; I squander much of my income which I might spare for such as are in need. And do you imagine that your tears and your blessing are of no account? The man who has lacks the power to bless, he must give; but if the great and the rich of this world have the distribution of its goods and honours, fate, in compensation, has assigned to the miserable the privilege of blessing, which the fortunate do not even know how to covet." So, when Kraft made pitiful complaint of his impotence to face the facts of life, Goethe gives this counsel which he himself had daily to lay to heart: "*Must* is hard, but it is only when a man *must* that his real inner nature is revealed. Any one can follow his own caprices." What the whole correspondence shows is a "good will," inspired by a profound sympathy for one of those unfortunates whom in his *Harzreise* Goethe had described as helpless victims of a malign fate, and it was out of

the depths of his own experience that he gave his sympathy and his advice.

Goethe's official duties had not hitherto been burdensome, but in the beginning of 1779 he was appointed to two posts, which involved close and continuous application. On January 13 he was made chief of the War Commission—a charge of special responsibility at this time, as the Duchy might be involved in the threatened war between Prussia and Austria. During the months that followed his appointment the work of recruiting in all parts of the Duke's dominions was the chief business of the author of *Werther*. To this charge was shortly afterwards added another—the superintendence of the roads of the Duchy. Henceforward, to the close of his first ten years in Weimar, public business was to engross Goethe's attention more and more, till at length the burden became intolerable.

What was Goethe's own attitude towards these official duties which were to occupy him during the years that were immediately before him? His personal testimony is sufficiently conflicting. At one time he appears to be convinced that he has chosen the better part; at another, that he is dissipating his energies in activities which were out of his natural sphere. It is with alternating confidence and despondency, therefore, that he refers to his labours as a Minister of State. It is to be noted that it was of his own free choice that he undertook the various public charges that he came to hold. He convinced himself that he was working not only for the general good, but for his own. "The pressure of business," he wrote in his Diary immediately after becoming head of the War Commission, "has the finest effect upon the soul; when relieved, it plays more freely and enjoys life. There is nothing more miserable than the self-contented man who has nothing to do; the most splendid gift becomes nauseous to him." These are the words of one to whom the practical life is not his true vocation. About the same date when he set

down the words just quoted, he wrote thus to Frau von Stein, and he frequently repeated the same sentiment: "Silence is so beautiful that I wish I might keep it for years." And his frequent visitations of discouragement show that the management of men and affairs was not his natural function. Such self-communing as this, for example, reveals his deepest feelings regarding the life to which he had bound himself. "No human being knows what I have to do, and how many enemies I have to contend with in order to bring forth the little I accomplish."

In a singularly interesting entry in his *Diary* (August 7, 1779) Goethe surveys his present and his past with a troubled introspection which recalls the self-communings of the saints of Christian biography, and the passage may fitly conclude this sketch of the first period of his administrative activity. "Quiet retrospect of my past life, on the confusions of youth, its unrest, its craving for knowledge, its endless seeking after something that will bring satisfaction. How especially I found delight in mysteries, in obscure fanciful relations of things. How half-heartedly I attacked anything scientific, and how ready I was to let it slip from me again. How a kind of shame-faced egotism runs through all I then wrote. How short-sightedly and giddily I concerned myself with things human and divine. How there was so little of deliberate action, nay, even of well-directed thinking and creation; how many days were lost in time-consuming sentiment and unreal passion; how little profit I derived therefrom; and, now that half of my life is spent, there is no turning back, but rather I am like one who has saved himself from drowning and whom the sun beneficently begins to dry. The time I have spent in the bustle of the world since October, '75, I do not yet trust myself to review. God help further and vouchsafe lights that we may not stand so much in our own way; cause us from morning till night to do our duty, and give us clear conceptions of the consequences of things, so that one may not



be as men who all day complain of headache, and to cure it dose themselves with drugs and every evening take too much wine. May the idea of purity, which extends even to the morsel I take into my mouth, become ever brighter in me."

## CHAPTER XVII

### GOETHE AS PRIVY COUNCILLOR

AUGUST, 1779—JUNE, 1782

IN a letter dated August 9, 1779, Goethe communicated a joyful piece of news to his mother. It was to the effect that in the second half of the following September she might expect a visit from the Duke and himself. The Duke, he told her, had the intention of seeing the Rhine country at the most beautiful season of the year, and in the course of their travels they meant to spend a few days at Frankfort.

In his letter to his mother Goethe communicated neither the projected scope of the journey nor its primary intention. The intended course of travel was in fact a plan deliberately conceived by Goethe, and with a definite object. In the interests of the Duke and of his future as a ruler, it had suggested itself to Goethe that the Duke's removal for a time from the distractions of Weimar might have a beneficial effect on his character. New scenes, the sight of other social conditions, intercourse with enlightened strangers, might suggest new ideals and divert his aims into other channels. At all events, his absence for a time from Weimar would afford him an opportunity, if he chose to use it, of making a fresh start in life, both as a man and as a prince. The region chosen by Goethe as most likely to effect the desired result was Switzerland. In the summer of 1775, with the object of effacing his love for Lili Schönemann, he had himself experienced the influence of the sublimities of Swiss scenery, though it had failed to cure

his passion for Lili. In the Duke's case there was no such powerful emotion to be diverted, and from what Goethe knew of his character he judged that Switzerland and its people would appeal to him. There would be something of adventure in the journey, for, though the admiration of mountain scenery had already come into fashion through the writings of Rousseau, Switzerland was not yet in the beaten track of tourists.

When it was known at the Weimar Court that the Duke was to set forth on a prolonged course of travel and that Goethe was to be his companion, there were many shakings of the head. In the general opinion Goethe's influence on the young prince had hitherto been wholly mischievous, and it was with dismay that the older courtiers regarded their closer companionship in circumstances when there would be no public opinion to restrain him. Another painful surprise was in store for them. On September 6, 1779, a few days before the Duke started on his journey, he formally appointed Goethe a Privy Councillor—a position hitherto held only by men of noble rank and of long public service. When we compare the feelings with which his promotion was generally regarded in Weimar with his own personal feelings as they are recorded in his Diary, we see the point of his often-repeated complaint that nobody understood him. On the day of his appointment he wrote these words: "the whirl of earthly things, also all manner of personal dislikes take possession of me. These emotions it is not fitting that I should set down." And he adds in parenthesis: "Observation of a political defect of mine which it is difficult to eradicate."

On September 12 the Duke and his new Privy Councillor started on their journey, the Duke under the name of the Chief of his Forestry Service, Baron von Wedel, who also accompanied them. Their destination was kept secret, and it was not till they had been more than a week on their travels that Goethe revealed



it even to Frau von Stein. As Goethe had intimated to his mother, the travellers put up for a few days in the paternal home in Frankfort. It was a jubilant time for the vivacious Frau Aja, doubly rejoiced at having a Duke as her guest and at seeing her son after the lapse of four years. In an ecstasy of delight she communicated her emotions to the Duchess Amalia, to whom she was already known by report and by personal correspondence. "*Hätschelhans*,"<sup>1</sup> she wrote, "I have found greatly improved. He looks healthier, and in all respects he has become more manly. To the great joy of all his old acquaintances, his personal character is not in the least altered. . . ." There was one inmate of the house, however, who did not share in the joyous bustle of the visit. Herr Goethe, the father, was now in a state of mental decay, and, moreover, he had from the first regarded with disapproval his son's attachment to the Court of Weimar. It was with no anticipation of a cordial reception from his father, therefore, that Goethe had brought the Duke to his home. "On his part," he had written to his mother, "I shall ask nothing but whatever behaviour the humour of the moment may prompt." It was the last time that father and son were to meet,<sup>2</sup> and this their last meeting did not lessen their estrangement, which dated from the time when Goethe emerged from boyhood.

From Frankfort the travellers made their way southwards to Switzerland, and, as they went, Goethe made three visits which recalled the tenderest and most vivid memories of his past life. From Strassburg, which was one of their halting-places, he rode alone to Sesenheim, the home of Friederike Brion, the most touching figure among his early loves. Eight years before, he had, as he himself tells us, left her at a moment when their parting might have cost her her life. Her memory had been a permanent

<sup>1</sup> This was her pet name for Goethe.

<sup>2</sup> Herr Goethe died in 1782.

reproach to him, and it was with natural apprehension regarding his reception that he presented himself to her family circle. To his new love, Frau von Stein, he related how he was received. By the whole household and by Friederike herself he was met with a cordial warmth in which there was no suggestion of unpleasant memories, and the two former lovers talked without a shade of embarrassment. "I stayed the night," he adds, "and left next morning at daybreak, parting from friendly faces, so that I can once again think of that corner of the world with a contented mind, and be no longer haunted by the memory of those souls unreconciled." In Strassburg he renewed acquaintance with another of his old loves, Lili Schönemann, from whom four years before he had broken away in a paroxysm of distracting passions. His meeting with Lili went off as pleasantly as his meeting with Friederike. The circumstances in which he found Lili were, indeed, not such as to evoke compunction. She was at play with a baby seven weeks old, her mother by her side, and was provided with an excellent husband. On parting with her he wrote to Frau von Stein: "I cannot describe the delightful feelings which I carry away with me." It was with different emotions that he set out on another visit from Strassburg—to the grave and the former household of his sister at Emmendingen. Since her death her husband, Georg Schlosser, had taken another wife—Johanna Fahlmer, an old acquaintance of Goethe, and the changed household suggested painful memories. "Here I am," he wrote to the same correspondent, "near the grave of my sister; her household is to me like a canvas from which a dear image has been obliterated."

"Switzerland lies before us, and with the aid of Heaven we hope to wander about among the mighty shapes of the world and to bathe our spirits in the sublimity of nature." It was with this anticipation on Goethe's part that the travellers, in the beginning of October, entered Switzerland by way of

Bâle. During a tour of about two months they visited the chief towns of the country, and saw much of its most impressive mountain scenery. Goethe, at least, if not the Duke, was profoundly impressed by what he saw. "The sublime," he wrote, "affords a beautiful repose for the soul, . . . a pure emotion, filling to the very brim without overflowing. . . ." There were experiences in the course of the journey that were specially memorable for Goethe. At Geneva he met de Saussure, who had been the first traveller, not a guide, to climb Mont Blanc, and whose name was already widely known for his comprehensive study of the physical characteristics of Switzerland. The significance of Goethe's meeting with de Saussure was that it stimulated the interest in the physical sciences which was already nascent in him, and which subsequently was to become a master-passion. The monastery at St. Gothard, which was also visited, recalled old memories in Goethe. There in June, 1775, he had been tempted to descend to the plains of Italy, and only the thought of Lili had deterred him. On the present occasion he felt no such temptation, and he specifies the reasons: it would not have been for the good of the Duke to visit Italy at that time, and it would have been imprudent to prolong their absence from home. The supreme influence of the Swiss journey on the Duke was reserved till near its close. It was the spiritual influence of the man with whom, in 1774, Goethe had spent the most stimulating weeks of his life—Caspar Lavater, pastor in Zurich. Goethe was not disappointed in his expectation of the effects of Lavater's character both on the Duke and on himself. "Our intercourse with Lavater," he wrote to Frau von Stein, "is for the Duke and myself what I hoped it would be—the seal and culminating point of our travels, and a heavenly feast the good results of which will long be seen." Later he again wrote to the same correspondent. "We are happy in and with Lavater; it is a tonic for us all to be near a man who lives and



strives in the shelter of domestic affection, a man who enjoys his work for the work's own sake. . . . How gladly would I spend a quarter of a year with him, though not certainly in idleness as now. . . . Truth is ever new to us, and to see once again a human being so thoroughly genuine [as Lavater], makes one feel as if one were just newly born. . . . Here, as never before, I realize fully what a moral death society usually is." It was one of the ironies in Goethe's life that within a few years the vagaries of the man of whom he thus spoke were to awaken the deepest repugnance of which his nature was capable.

The journey homewards after the party left Switzerland was a descent from poetry to prose. With the exception of a few pleasant days spent in the Goethe home in Frankfort, it was mainly occupied with a round of visits to the neighbouring Courts, which after the free life in Switzerland were a weariness of the flesh for both Goethe and the Duke. "God in Heaven," Goethe wrote from one of them, "what a paradise is Weimar!" At Weimar they arrived on January 13, 1780, after an absence of three months. "Every one is much satisfied with the Duke," Goethe recorded in his Diary; "every one praises us, and the journey is a masterpiece! an epic! The title is as luck will have it; it does not alter the substance." Even those in Weimar who had regarded the journey with most displeasure were forced to admit that its results had been beneficial both for the Duke and for the companion of his travels. Yet in the case of the Duke, as Goethe was to learn, neither the sublimities of the Swiss mountains nor the purifying influence of Lavater had wholly cured the radical defects of his character.

Again settled in Weimar, Goethe had now to face the responsibility of his new office of Privy Councillor. His duties were sufficiently miscellaneous. He continued to retain the charge of the public highways and the superintendence of the military arrangements in the Duke's dominions, and as *Legationsrat* it fell to

him to act as ambassador to the neighbouring Courts. As Privy Councillor, the management of the Crown lands and of finance further devolved upon him, so that the main burden of the administration of the Duchy had to be borne by one whose whole previous action had been dictated by the whim of the moment. What is clear, alike from his own testimony and the testimony of others, is that he addressed himself to his various tasks with the resolution to discharge them with all the energy and foresight that were at his command. What is equally evident is his consciousness that by temperament and natural bent he was unfitted to deal with the ordinary run of men in the conduct of affairs.<sup>1</sup> Unintelligent routine, incompetent or perfunctory officials, at times drove him to despair. The conduct of the Duke himself also gave him many trying moments. With excellent intentions and general approval of Goethe's efforts at reform, Carl August appeared to him incapable of persistence in an adopted line of policy, while to gratify his momentary pleasures he did not hesitate to squander means which his revenue was ill able to afford. "I no longer wonder," he wrote to his confidant Frau von Stein, and the passage is only one of many to the same purport, "I no longer wonder that princes are usually so mad, stupid, and foolish. It would be hard to have as good a disposition as the Duke, hard to have as many prudent and good men in the circle of one's friends as he, yet expectation is persistently disappointed, and the child and the fish-tail *will* peep out before one is aware." As one incident illustrates, Goethe did not fail in plain dealing with the Duke regarding his aberrations. Presenting himself to him in the guise of a wretched countryman, he recited a set of doggerel verses recounting all the miseries from which his land was suffering.

Manifold and burdensome as were his official

<sup>1</sup> "Es ist mir auch ein Unglück, ich habe gar keine Sprache für die Menschen, wenn ich nicht eine Weile mit ihnen bin."—To Frau von Stein, September 24, 1780.

duties, they did not absorb all his activities. As in a manner he was the poet of the Court, he had to minister to its pleasures by the production of theatrical pieces afterwards to be noted. In his solitude, also, he assiduously practised drawing, still under the illusion that one day mastery would crown his efforts. But the period of his life before us (1779-82) was marked by a new development of his genius which was eventually to have important results for himself and the world. "The need of my nature," he wrote about this time, "compels me to a manifold activity," and henceforward his career was to be a remarkable commentary on the reflection. Now for the first time he begins seriously to occupy himself with the physical sciences. From his earliest youth, he himself tells us, he had "a passion for investigating natural things." In Frankfort, during his period of ill-health after his return from Leipzig, he had busied himself with chemical experiments, and at Strassburg he had attended lectures on chemistry and anatomy. But hitherto his interest in nature had been that of the poet and not that of the scientific searcher. It was to the science of mineralogy that his curiosity was in the first place directed. The mining operations at Ilmenau had naturally roused his interest in the subject, and, as we have seen, this interest had been quickened by the Swiss journey and his intercourse with de Saussure. It was in the year following his return from Switzerland (1780) that he first applied himself to the study of geology in general with a passionate ardour, which, as the Second Part of *Faust* shows, he retained to the close of his life. "Since I have had to do with the mines at Ilmenau," he wrote, "I give myself with my whole soul to mineralogy." Among his friends Merck was the only one who had a sympathetic and intelligent interest in his new studies, and it is in his letters to Merck that we find special reference to them. "Have you seen de Saussure's *Voyage dans les Alpes*?" he inquires of Merck. "The small portion of it I have been able to



read fills me with affectionate confidence in him." During the same period his attention was turned to two other sciences, in both of which he was to make important discoveries—anatomy and botany. From Loder, the professor of anatomy at the University of Jena, he acquired such a knowledge of that subject that he gave lectures on it in the Drawing School which, under his direction, had been established in Weimar. With vivid interest, also, he read Buffon's *Les Époques de la Nature*, which appeared to him "at least to rest on sounder evidence than the book of Genesis." Thus he was fairly embarked on those studies of nature which were subsequently to be his most absorbing occupation, and the results of which gave him greater satisfaction than the products of his poetic genius.

The record of Goethe's inner life throughout the three years before us reveals the same continued struggle after self-mastery, the same alternations of hope and despondency in view of the life to which he was committed. A few extracts from his Diary for the first half of the year 1780 after his return from Switzerland will illustrate the variability of his moods. "I must mark more closely the succession of good and bad days that revolves within me. Passion, dependence, impulse to do this or that; invention, execution, order, all is in constant change and maintains a regular succession. So, too, cheerfulness, gloom, strength, elasticity, weakness, indifference, desire" (March). "I was dizzy before the height of my good fortune. . . . Often, like Polycrates, I am inclined to throw my most precious jewel into the water. Everything I attempt turns out happily" (April). "In the sphere of my present life I meet with little, almost no, hindrance outside of myself. Within myself still many. Human defects are veritable tape-worms; we manage to tear a piece away, but the stump remains. Nevertheless, I will be master! No one who does not wholly deny himself is worthy to rule, and can rule" (May). "One could

accomplish still more, even the incredible, if one were less ambitious. . . . All *must* at last come to a point, but iron patience, a stony endurance" (June).

Passages in his letters to correspondents illustrate the same inner conflict. Here, for example, is one (in a letter addressed to his *protégé* Kraft) in which he sums up his philosophy of life as it then presented itself to him. "Accustomed to do every day what circumstances demand, what my discernment, my capabilities and powers permit me, I am undisturbed as to how long it [his life] may continue, and constantly remind myself of the sage who declared that even three hours well spent are sufficient." In a letter to his mother, who had shown some anxiety regarding the state of his health and regarding his position in Weimar, he thus surveys his past and his future: "As far as my position itself is concerned, it offers me, notwithstanding great drawbacks, very much that is desirable. The best proof of this is that I can imagine no other to which I would at the moment care to pass. . . . Merck<sup>1</sup> and others judge my present situation in quite a false light; they see only what I sacrifice and not what I gain; and they cannot comprehend that I daily become richer, while I daily give up so much. . . . The incongruity between the cramped and dead-alive bourgeois circle and a nature so large and impetuous as mine would have driven me mad. Despite a lively imagination and insight into human things, I should always have remained unacquainted with the world, wrapt in an eternal childhood which, chiefly through conceit and all related failings, is unendurable to one's self and to others. How much more fortunate it was to see myself placed in a position for which I was in no way fitted, where, through many blunders due to ignorance and overhaste, I had opportunity enough to get to know myself and others. . . . Nevertheless, believe me that a great part of the cheerfulness with which I

<sup>1</sup> Merck had changed his opinion regarding the effects of Weimar society on Goethe.

endure and toil springs from the thought that all these sacrifices are of my own free will and that I have only to order post-horses to find again with you all that is needful and pleasant in life, with absolute repose. For, without this prospect, and if in hours of depression I had to regard myself as a bondsman and a day-labourer, many things would be much more distasteful to me than they are."

In these passages we have Goethe's own estimate of himself and of the measure of success that attended his self-discipline. What impression, we may ask, did his personality, after all his striving, make upon others? We have characterizations of him at this period by two observers, both of whom were in intimate intercourse with him. A few months after his return from the Swiss journey, Wieland wrote as follows to Merck: "I cannot express to you how completely I am satisfied with all that he [Goethe] does and says, and, in short, with his whole manner. In his public bearing I observe a *σωφροσύνη* which is gradually reassuring people's minds and is a pledge to me that all will yet go as well with us as one can reasonably expect." The other description is by Major von Knebel, who had been the means of introducing Goethe to the Duke at Frankfort. Von Knebel was a man of cultivated mind,<sup>1</sup> though of undistinguished character, and was one of the few friends of Goethe's youth who retained his friendship to the end. "I am rather vexed," von Knebel wrote to Lavater, "that you don't really know Goethe. How shall I put it? I am well aware that he is not always amiable. He has unpleasant sides, as experience has taught me. But, take him all in all as a human being, he is infinitely good. He is a wonder to me, even in respect of goodness. None of the tourists see him properly, yet they all pronounce judgment on him. In Weimar itself he is hardly to be seen in his true light; away from it he cannot be so seen at all. Yet, at the moment I'd take an oath

<sup>1</sup> He translated Lucretius.



that his disposition is upright, his intentions good and pure. Misunderstood he is bound to be, and he himself appears to mould his life accordingly. . . . He is a wonderful mixture, or, rather, a double nature compounded of hero and comedian. Still the hero prevails in him. . . .”

Equally from his own testimony and from the testimony of others we see that Goethe was no longer the irresponsible youth whose pranks and humours had made him be regarded as the Duke's evil genius. Partly by circumstances and partly by his own self-schooling he had attained a concentration of purpose and a measure of self-control which promised the full realization of the ideal he had set before him. As we have seen, he was himself keenly conscious that he was yet far from having attained that inner harmony, which in his conception was necessary for the concentrated application of all his powers as a trust to himself and to the world. During the next four years the pressure of circumstances was to subject him to a still sterner test, and, indeed, was such that in the interests of both his bodily and his mental health a change of conditions became an imperative necessity for him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF FINANCE

JUNE, 1782—SEPTEMBER, 1786

WITH the month of June, 1782, begins another epoch in Goethe's life in Weimar—an epoch marked by important changes equally in his public and in his private relations. On the first of that month he removed from the *Gartenhaus* which had been his home during the previous seven years. It was with keen regret that he left it, as its solitude had been his permanent solace amid the distractions of the Court and the worries of public life, and in the years to come he was frequently to find a desirable refuge in its seclusion. His new abode was that house in the Frauenplan in Weimar itself, now piously preserved as he left it, with all its treasures, so impressively illustrative of his manifold interests and of his life of sedulous toil.<sup>1</sup>

The occasion of his change of residence was a change in his outward circumstances which necessitated his establishment in a more imposing home. A few days after his removal, mainly at the instance of the Duchess Amalia he accepted a diploma of nobility, which at the Duke's request was conferred on him by the Emperor. From the words he wrote to Frau von Stein on the occasion we are to infer that he was not greatly elated by the honour. "Here," he wrote to her, "I send you<sup>2</sup> the diploma,

<sup>1</sup> It was hired for him by the Duke, who subsequently (1792) bought it and presented it to him. It was then remodelled.

<sup>2</sup> At this period he addressed her as "Du."

merely that you may know how it looks. I am so strangely constituted that it has no meaning whatever for me. How much happier were I, if I could be detached from the strife of politics, and near you, dearest, could devote myself to the arts and sciences for which I am born." So far from having this desire of his heart gratified, he was on the point of being more deeply plunged in public business than ever. A few days after he received his patent of nobility, he, at the Duke's request, undertook the management of the finance of the Duchy, and during the next four years he was to act as President of that department.

It was with full knowledge of the task that lay before him that Goethe undertook the management of the finance of the Duke's dominions. Owing to the incompetence and negligence of his predecessor the public revenue and expenditure were in disastrous confusion. In a letter to Knebel, Goethe described the scope of the work he had undertaken and the spirit in which he addressed himself to it. "From this midsummer" (1782), he wrote, "I shall have to sacrifice two full years till the threads are so far gathered together that I can remain or resign, without discredit. I look, however, neither to the right nor to the left, and my old motto—

*Hic est aut nusquam quod quaerimus*

is, just as before, being written up afresh over a new office. With it all, I am better pleased than ever, since now, at least in this department [of finance], it is no longer my fate to desire the good and half do it, and to loathe the bad and suffer it all. What now happens I must ascribe to myself. . . . That I have hitherto toiled so faithfully and diligently by myself helps me infinitely: I have now clear conceptions of almost all necessary things and minute details, and so I get along very easily."

It was in a sanguine mood that he thus wrote to Knebel; before his task was accomplished he was to have hours of less self-complacency. It is to be



remembered that he continued to discharge the duties of the other offices he held. He made a point of never missing a meeting of the Privy Council, distasteful though its meetings were to him at all times. He was in fact what Herder called him—the *factotum*, the *pontifex maximus* of the Duke's territory. His main preoccupation, however, was to place the state economy on a more satisfactory basis, and to effect the necessary reform he set himself to compass two objects—the diminution of expenditure and the improvement of the land and the people. In carrying out the first of these objects he had to reckon with the opposition of all the privileged classes and of the Duke himself. The Duke had kept a free table, and Goethe succeeded so far as to diminish its guests by one-half. The Duke's outlay on travel and on hunting expeditions was likewise curtailed, and, what was more distasteful to him than any other economy, the army was reduced from six hundred to three hundred men. To the privileged classes Goethe gave offence by a rearrangement of taxation on more equitable principles. The expenses thus saved Goethe devoted to the other object he had at heart—the improvement of the land and the people. He provided better roads, built or repaired bridges, constructed new waterways, fostered schools, and gave special attention to the interests of the University of Jena. He did much to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and succeeded to a certain extent in establishing a system of peasant proprietorship. After a year's strenuous effort he could write thus to Knebel regarding his measure of success: "My finance matters are going better than a year ago seemed to me likely. I am happy and prosperous in my administration, and at the same time hold tenaciously to my plans and principles."

In his communications with Knebel, Goethe puts the best face on his position, but from his letters to other correspondents we receive a somewhat

different impression of it. His main trouble, as has been said, was with the Duke, and the judgments he passed on him on different occasions show how keenly he felt the Duke's opposition to measures of reform. "The Duke is happy with his hounds," he writes to Frau von Stein; "I am glad of it for his sake. But he reduces his retinue and adds to his pack. It is always the same; a great to-do about hunting a hare to death." And not only to others but to the Duke himself he spoke with a frankness regarding his selfish pleasures which does equal credit to both. Among his other indulgences the Duke had enclosed a number of wild boars at the neighbouring Ettersberg, and Goethe wrote as follows to him: "I am heartily glad that you are enjoying your hunting, and I cherish the hope that after you get back you will, by way of return, rid your friends of a menace that is making them anxious. I mean the destructive denizens of the Ettersberg. I am sorry to mention these animals, because from the first I opposed their being quartered there. . . . Only the general demand can move me to break a silence to which I was almost vowed; and I prefer to write, since it will be one of the first matters to be brought before you on your return." But the most memorable commentary on the relations between Goethe and the Duke is to be found in the poem *Ilmenau*, addressed to the prince on his birthday (September 3, 1783). No nobler counsel was ever given by a subject to his master—counsel expressed in words that are at the same time in the highest strain of poetry. The scene of the poem is in the neighbourhood of Ilmenau, where the Duke had gone on one of his hunting expeditions. He and his attendants have encamped for the night in a valley at the base of the Kichelhahn, and Goethe represents himself as sitting apart looking on at the company reclining by the camp-fires. After a description of the characteristics of each of the band, he passes to reflections on the past and future of himself and the Duke.

## 270 PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER

His own past he surveys with mingled regret and satisfaction—

Ich brachte reines Feuer vom Altar ;  
Was ich entzündet, ist nicht reine Flamme.  
Der Sturm vermehrt die Glut und die Gefahr,  
Ich schwanke nicht, indem ich mich verdamme.

Pure from the altar was the fire I brought ;  
Yet, what I kindled, is not now pure flame.  
The storm doth fan the glow, with danger fraught,  
I waver not, while I myself condemn.

And he concludes—

Nun sitz' ich hier zugleich erhoben und gedrückt,  
Unschuld'g und gestraft, unschuldig und beglückt. ]

Now I sit here, elated and depressed,  
Blameless and happy, blameless and distressed.

With similar mingled emotions he reflects on the character and career of the Duke, whom he describes as "*all mein Wohl und all mein Ungemach.*" In the Duke as in himself high aspirations had been thwarted by ill-directed passions—

Gewiss, ihm geben auch die Jahre  
Die rechte Richtung seiner Kraft.  
Noch ist bei tiefer Neigung für das Wahre  
Ihm Irrthum eine Leidenschaft.  
Der Vorwitz lockt ihn in die Weite,  
Kein Fels ist ihm zu schroff, kein Steg zu schmal ;  
Der Unfall lauert an der Seite  
Und stürzt ihn in den Arm der Qual.

Be sure to him the years will also give  
Wisdom to order all his powers aright,  
Yet, with his heart's desire the truth to share,  
Error is still his passionate delight.  
Still frowardness entices him astray,  
No cliff for him too steep, no path too strait ;  
Disaster lies in ambush by the way,  
And hurls him to the embrace of misery.

And he reminds him of the principle which expresses Goethe's own final attitude to life—

Allein, wer andre wohl zu leiten strebt,  
Muss fähig sein, viel zu entbehren.

But he who others rightly strives to lead,  
Much to renounce must have the will and power.



Noteworthy, also, is the concluding stanza of the poem in which he places before the Duke the ideal of the beneficent ruler—an ideal, as we have seen, which it was Goethe's endeavour to realize in his own official life—

So wandle du—der Lohn ist nicht gering—  
Nicht schwankend hin, wie jener Sämann ging,  
Dass bald ein Korn, des Zufalls leichtes Spiel,  
Hier auf den Weg, dort zwischen Dornen fiel;  
Nein! streue klug wie reich, mit männlich stäter Hand,  
Den Segen aus auf ein geackert Land;  
Dann lass es ruhn; die Ernte wird erscheinen  
Und Dich beglücken und die Deinen.

So guide thy path—good guerdon shalt thou know—  
Not as that sower, who went forth to sow  
And let his seed now by the wayside fall  
And now 'mid thorns, at Fortune's random call.  
No! prudently with manful, steady hand  
Strew blessing richly o'er a well-tilled land;  
There let it rest; the harvest will be reaped,  
And happiness on thee and thine be heaped.

Thwarted by the Duke in his reforms at home, Goethe also found his counsels neglected in the matter of foreign policy. During the years 1785-6 the smaller states of Germany were alarmed by the aggressive policy of Austria, and an alliance of them, with Prussia at its head (the *Fürstenbund*), was formed to resist it. At all periods of his life in favour of peace, Goethe disapproved of the Duke's engaging himself in the confederation. But the Duke had strong military instincts and was, moreover, ambitious of playing a larger part in the world than was possible within the limits of his own territory, and to Goethe's chagrin he joined the alliance, of which he became an active member. So keen was the opposition between them that it resulted in temporary estrangement, and it was with bitterness in his soul that in this period of estrangement Goethe wrote these words to a correspondent: "I always maintain that he who concerns himself with administration, without being sole lord and

master, must be either a Philistine, a knave, or a fool."

The labours and anxieties of administration were far from absorbing all his mental activities.<sup>1</sup> "If I have not a constant succession of new ideas to work upon," he himself says, "I become like one sick." His occupations apart from his official duties were, indeed, such as would have filled the lives of most men, and bear witness equally to his manifold powers of mind and his capacity for toil. He acted as manager of the amateur Court theatre till the close of 1783, when a professional troupe was permanently established in Weimar. Drawing he continued to practise as assiduously as leisure would permit, though he became more and more convinced that supreme excellence in the art was beyond his reach. But, as in the previous period, it was physical science that most absorbingly engrossed his attention, and he pursued it with such intensity that in one of its departments he was rewarded with a notable discovery.

We have seen with what ardour Goethe had given himself to the study of anatomy, and it was in this science that his industry was rewarded. From the beginning of his nature-studies he had formed the conception that nature works on a uniform plan. But in the view of the professional anatomists there was a notable break between the structure of man and the lower animals; in man there was no intermaxillary bone in the upper jaw—a fact which seemed to imply that he was a creation apart. Goethe's discovery was that the intermaxillary bone does exist in man; and the discovery filled him with an exultation which he never displayed in the case of his poetic productions. "In accordance with the teaching of the Gospel," he wrote to Herder from

<sup>1</sup> Official journeys occupied much of his time. In 1783 and 1784 he travelled in the Harz district, and in 1785 he visited the Fichtelgebirge on a geological excursion with Knebel. He also made frequent visits to Ilmenau.

Jena, "I must inform you with all haste of a piece of good luck that has befallen me. I have found—neither gold nor silver, but what gives me inexpressible delight—the *os intermaxillare* in man!" In the same tone of jubilation he communicated his discovery to the confidant of all his intellectual interests, Frau von Stein. "I have had a most delightful experience; I have made an anatomical discovery, that is important and beautiful. You shall share it too. But no word of it to any one. A letter has also announced it to Herder under seal of secrecy. My joy is such that all my bowels are stirred within me."<sup>1</sup>

Along with anatomy, botany and geology now began to attract his serious attention. We have seen how he had already been interested in Buffon's *Époques de la Nature*; in 1785 he took up the study of another author, Linnæus, whom at a later day he mentions with Shakespeare and Spinoza as having exercised the greatest influence on his intellectual life. "I have Linnæus's *Botanical Philosophy* by me," he wrote to Frau von Stein from Ilmenau, "and hope in this solitude at last to read it consecutively; hitherto I have only dipped into it." As the result of his reading and observation he was already on the track of the great botanical discovery associated with his name—the metamorphosis of plants. In July, 1786, he wrote to the same correspondent as follows: "If I could only share my vision and my joy with any one, but it is impossible. And it is no dream, no phantasy; it is a discovery of the essential form, with which nature, as it were, is for ever but playing, and, in playing, brings forth life in all its variety. Had I time in our brief span of life, I make bold to say that I

<sup>1</sup> Goethe wrote a paper on his discovery entitled, *Dem Menschen wie den Tieren ist ein Zwischenknochen der oberen Kinnladen zuzuschreiben*, which, however, was not published till 1820. Two or three years earlier the French anatomist, Vicq D'Azyr, had made the discovery, though this was unknown to Goethe.



would spread myself over all nature's kingdoms—over her whole kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

To geology he applied himself with the same zest as to botany and anatomy. At Ilmenau, in the Harz, in the Fichtelgebirge, he studied rock-formations on the spot, and his friends were pressed to send him fossils and stones for his personal examination. And in geology, as in botany and anatomy, the mere acquisition of knowledge was not his aim; it was his enthusiastic desire to extend the limits of existing knowledge. “The time will soon come,” he wrote in 1782, “when fossils will not be arranged pell-mell, but relatively to the epochs of the world.” Two years later he flatters himself that he is on the way to an intelligible conception of the earth's formation. “The ideas I have conceived on the formation of the globe,” he then wrote, “have been well confirmed and justified, and I can say that I have seen objects which, while confirming my system, surprise me by their novelty and grandeur.”

It was with some amusement that Goethe's friends in Weimar saw one whom they had hitherto regarded only as a poet devoting himself with such favour to dry science. Herder mocked at the “hammering on dead stones,” and in a humorous letter to Knebel, Frau von Stein referred to her lover's vagaries. “Herder's new work, the first part of his *Ideen*, makes it probable that we were once plants and animals; what nature will further hammer out of us will probably remain unknown. Goethe is now seriously investigating these things, and everything which has passed through his mind becomes in the highest degree interesting. So owing to him I have become interested in these abominable bones and dreary stones.”

From first to last, in his nature-study, be it noted, Goethe's attitude differed from that of the

<sup>1</sup> A year later (1787), when in Sicily, Goethe discovered the final proof of the metamorphosis of plants.

ordinary man of science. His interest in such discoveries as he made was not for themselves, but for the light they cast on the processes of nature as a whole. His persistent endeavour was to attain a conception of the *Kosmos* which would satisfy both his intellect and his heart. As we gather from certain expressions in his correspondence at this period, he had already arrived at certain conceptions, which, though subsequently modified and rectified, governed his investigations to the end. In a letter to Knebel relative to his paper on the intermaxillary bone we have this passage: "The harmony of the whole makes every creature what it is, and the human being is a human being as much by the form and nature of his upper jaw as by the form and nature of the last joint of his little toe. And so, again, every creature is but a tone, a shade of a great harmony, which must be studied in its entirety, otherwise no individual has any meaning." As the result of his official experience and of his studies of nature, he was profoundly struck by the contrast between the action of men and the processes of inanimate things. "The strangest feature in the way things are connected is that the most important events that can happen to a man have no connection with each other"; and he felt himself comforted by the fact that "the consequences of nature made abundant amends for the inconsequence of man." In one remarkable piece, "one of the jewels of German literature," which belongs to this period, he has summarized his conception of the processes of nature in its totality. It is entitled *Die Natur*,<sup>1</sup> and is a rhapsody on the relations in which man stands to "the unsearchable, unconditioned, self-contradictory

<sup>1</sup> It originally appeared in the winter of 1782-3 in the *Journal von Tiefurt*, founded by the Duchess Amalia. As the contributions to the Journal were all in MS., and the piece is not in Goethe's hand-writing, some doubt has existed as to its authorship. But alike from the power and beauty of the style and from the range of thought it is inconceivable that any one but Goethe could have produced it.

being" that animates the universe. At a later time he thought it the expression of "a kind of pantheism," and defective from the fact that it overlooks what he calls "the two mainsprings to all nature"—polarity and ascent.

Goethe's speculations on nature and his bitter experience of public life may equally have incited him to renew his acquaintance with a philosopher who had formerly attracted him—Benedict Spinoza. When in his twenty-fifth year, he had given some attention to the writings of Spinoza, but he now turned to him with a keenness begotten of his widened experience. He found in him two things that at this stage of his development were urgently necessary to him—a conception of the world-process which commended itself to his intellect, and an attitude to life which fortified his moral being. In two letters, one addressed to Herder and the other to Fritz Jacobi, we have the full expression of his double debt to the "sainted" Spinoza, as he calls him in a note to Frau von Stein. "This is to tell you," he wrote to Herder, "that I could not get to the end of the newest of Hebrew Testaments,<sup>1</sup> that I sent it to Frau von Stein, who will perhaps be more fortunate, and that I straightway opened Spinoza, and starting from the proposition, *qui Deum amat, conari non potest, ut Deus ipsum contra amet*, studied some pages with the greatest edification by way of evening devotions. From all this it follows that I once and again commend to you the testament of John, the content of which comprehends Moses and the Prophets, the Evangelists and the Apostles." In his communication to Jacobi, it is as a student of nature that he acknowledges his obligation to Spinoza. "I hold more and more firmly to the atheist's way of worshipping God. . . . When you say one can only *believe* in God, I say to you that I attach great value to *seeing*, and when Spinoza

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the last publication of Mendelssohn, in which he defends Spinoza from the charge of atheism brought against him by Fritz Jacobi.



speaks of the *scientia intuitiva*, and says, '*Hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adæquata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ad adæquatam cognitionem essentiae rerum*,' these few words give me heart to devote my whole life to the contemplation of things."

From the development of his character and his ripened views regarding life and the world it was to be expected that Goethe's relations to his early friends would be correspondingly changed. During the period of his life before us we note a gradual alteration in the degree of his intimacy with both men and women who had been in his confidence before his coming to Weimar. In the whirl of the changed world in which he found himself it was natural that ties with former friends should be loosened. His new interests, the circumstances of his new life, were not theirs and were not such as he could communicate with the assurance of a sympathetic response. It was in a tone partly of regret and partly of self-reproach that a little more than a year after his arrival in Weimar he wrote to Lavater: "In my present life all my distant friends fade away into mist." For a time he kept up an intermittent correspondence with the three women, Johanna Fahlner, Frau von la Roche, and the Countess Stolberg, all of whom had formerly been the recipients of his emotions, but, as Frau von Stein gradually displaced all other women from his thoughts, his correspondence with them finally ceased.

In the case of the men whom he had formerly known it was Goethe's mental growth and altered ideals that necessarily occasioned a complete change of relations. The four who had been most to him before his settlement in Weimar were Merck, Lavater, Fritz Jacobi, and Herder, all men of strong idiosyncrasies and of distinctive outlook. To Merck, Goethe, in his Autobiography, amply acknowledges his debt at the period when he most needed frank and judicious criticism. Merck had, with keener insight than any

other, discerned the scope and nature of his genius, and, contrary to the opinion of other friends of Goethe's, had cordially approved his settlement in Weimar. During Goethe's first years there he had defended his conduct at the Court, and had praised his good influence on the Duke. In Merck, also, as we have seen, Goethe had found his most sympathetic correspondent in his scientific studies. But, as Goethe became more and more immersed in public business, Merck's opinion of his position in Weimar changed. He was convinced that, in devoting so much time and labour to the work of administration, he was sacrificing his genius, and with characteristic plain-speaking he told him so. The disagreement was fundamental, as it touched Goethe's reasoned conviction that, in undertaking the public charges he did, he was at once enriching his own experience and doing a beneficent work. The consequence was increasing estrangement, and in 1783 their correspondence closed.<sup>1</sup>

Broken friendships, according to Dr. Johnson, are among the untowardnesses of life which we have to face, and he was of the same opinion as Goethe that friendship is impossible without agreement in fundamentals. It was due to essential difference of outlook that Goethe was estranged from Lavater during the period before us. It was Lavater who, out of his unbounded admiration for Goethe's genius, had originally sought his acquaintance, and in the summer of 1774 they had spent some weeks together with mutual satisfaction and profit. We have seen, in connection with the Swiss journey in 1779-80, what importance Goethe attached to the Duke's intercourse with Lavater, and in what terms of laudation he spoke of Lavater's mind and character. But, in truth, there was an essential antipathy between their natures, and, as their respective views developed, the latent antipathy was gradually revealed. The grounds of difference lay deep, as they concerned

<sup>1</sup> Merck, in an access of melancholy, committed suicide in 1791.

their convictions on the two subjects, men's attitude to which determines their individuality,—religion and the processes of nature. From their first intercourse both had understood that they were not of the same mind as to the origin and significance of Christianity, but it was Lavater's hope and his persistent endeavour to bring Goethe round to his own views. It was this insistent attempt on Lavater's part, indeed, that was in large measure the occasion of their eventual breach. In a remarkable letter (June 22, 1781) in reply to one from Lavater, Goethe indicates firmly and courteously that their views are irreconcilable. "I know quite well that you cannot change your creed, and that your conviction is sincere, but since you keep preaching your faith and doctrine, I too feel compelled to keep setting ours before you as an enduring, steadfast rock of humanity which you and a whole Christendom may drench with your waters, but can neither overwhelm nor shake at its foundations." Uniformity and sequence in the processes of nature were Goethe's lifelong conviction, and it was with growing impatience that he saw Lavater giving himself up to charlatans, notably the arch-charlatan Cagliostro, as revealers of nature's secrets. In July, 1786, Lavater visited Weimar, and the meeting of the two proved that mutual understanding was impossible. "I found Goethe older, colder, wiser, firmer, more reserved, more practical," was Lavater's comment on their meeting. "No hearty, intimate word was exchanged between us; and I am for ever free from hate and love," was Goethe's report of it to Frau von Stein.

In the same summer (1774) in which Goethe first met Lavater he had also made the acquaintance of Fritz Jacobi. After a few days' intercourse they had parted with mutual admiration, and with the feeling that neither had ever met one who had made such large response to the needs of his nature. No more than Lavater, however, was Jacobi a kindred spirit to Goethe, and, as time passed, both were



to discover the essential differences between their aims and aspirations. After Goethe's settlement in Weimar incidents happened which gave rise to a coldness between them. The marriage of Johanna Fahlmer, Jacobi's step-aunt, to Schlosser, Goethe's brother-in-law, occasioned a coolness, and Jacobi's insistence on Goethe's payment of a debt to him was a further cause of estrangement. In a romance by Jacobi (*Eduard Allwills Briefsammlung*), one of the characters was generally recognized as drawn from Goethe, and the portrait was not flattering. Another romance of Jacobi's (*Woldemar*) was so distasteful to Goethe that he wrote a parody of it, and in a mad prank nailed the volume to a tree. But the cause of their alienation lay deeper; as in the case of Lavater it was profound disagreement on ultimate questions that divided them. For Jacobi, Spinoza was an "atheist," to be reprobated as one of the world's false prophets; for Goethe, Spinoza was the man who had the most direct vision of God. An actual breach between them never came, and they subsequently saw each other more than once, but to the end the one regarded the other as following false lights.<sup>1</sup>

The other three men who stood in close relations to Goethe were Major von Knebel, Wieland, and Herder. With von Knebel, Goethe retained a constant friendship to the last, von Knebel's death occurring in 1834, two years after Goethe's own. Wieland, who had hailed Goethe's advent in Weimar with such enthusiasm, retained his admiration and affection, though there was no real intellectual sympathy between them. Of all the men he knew it was to Herder that Goethe looked for the most sympathetic understanding of all his interests and activities. His intellectual debt to Herder in his Strassburg days (1770-71) he has recorded in his Autobiography. It was at Goethe's instance, as we have seen, that Herder was appointed Court Preacher at Weimar, though

<sup>1</sup> Jacobi died in 1819.

at the time his own remaining there was still uncertain. From his intercourse with Herder at Strassburg Goethe was fully aware of his difficult temper, and he was to have painful experience of it in the future. From the first Herder was dissatisfied with his position in Weimar, as he considered that due influence and authority were not accorded to him as General Superintendent of the Churches, and he blamed Goethe, the Duke's most confidential adviser, as responsible for it. In March, 1783, came a serious estrangement between them. On the occasion of the birth of an heir to the Duke, Herder preached the sermon. In this he discharged his spleen by a hardly veiled rebuke of the Duke and his ways which Goethe thought unbecoming, and which he frankly criticized. After a misunderstanding which lasted for several months, to Goethe's great satisfaction the quarrel was made up. "It is once again a happy chance in my life," he wrote to Jacobi, "that the unpleasant clouds which have so long separated me from Herder, had to disappear at last, and, as I am convinced, for ever." Goethe was over-sanguine, but for the next few years there was entire concord between them, and Herder came to speak of Goethe in terms of the warmest admiration. "He [Goethe]," he wrote to Knebel in March, 1785, "has head and heart always in the right place, and in every step of his life is a man. How many such are there?"

But the most important human relation of Goethe during the years 1776-86 was that with Frau von Stein. We have already seen the beginnings of their intercourse, and how almost from their first meeting he was fascinated by qualities both of mind and of heart which he found in her. Throughout all the period of his career we have been following, these relations continued, and from his side the story of them is told in even wearisome iteration in the letters he wrote her. There is no more remarkable record of a man's relation to a woman, and we may doubt whether his outpourings, expressing the mood of

every passing moment, and meant only for her to whom they were addressed, should ever have been given to the world. The burden of all he has to tell her is that she was an absolute necessity of his moral and intellectual being, and that only on condition of his love being returned could he find life worth living and strength to master himself. This is what, in almost daily letters, longer and shorter, whether in Weimar or away from it, he reiterates throughout the whole decade in all the moods of a passionate lover. What the letters prove is that, despite all his efforts after self-mastery, he was still the Goethe of early youth for whom a passion and, at the same time, a mentor were necessary. In Frau von Stein he found both, and the peculiar interest of his communications to her is that they reveal the desire for the satisfaction of his intellect as well as of his passion. From the quotations already given from his letters we have seen that she was the confidant of all his interests. When harassed and depressed by his official duties, it was to her that he confided his troubles and turned for solace and encouragement. It was she who stimulated him in his efforts to make himself an artist. When he threw himself into the investigation of nature, she went hand in hand with him, and they made a common study of the two authors who then most engrossed him—Shakespeare and Spinoza. It is this union of intellect and passion in their mutual relations that gives the letters a unique interest for an understanding of Goethe's manifold personality.

The course of their love certainly did not run smooth, and, as it is presented to us from his side, we may doubt whether pain or pleasure was the predominant ingredient in it. Their relation to each other, as they both recognized, was an unnatural one, and, moreover, neither was of a temperament that made it easier. Goethe, as we know, was physically and mentally the most sensitive of beings. Though his physical constitution was equal at times



to great exertion, it was peculiarly liable to attacks of various kinds, which for the time seem to have completely prostrated him. Apart from the state of his health, as he himself tells us, he was all his life subject to humours which tried his best friends. And, if he was thus abnormally sensitive, the lady, with a temperament totally different from his, was equally difficult. More or less of a chronic invalid, she was subject to fits of depression which made her incapable of the responsiveness which his nature demanded. The intercourse of two such natures, and under such conditions, necessarily had its alternations of hopes and fears, of trust and vague suspicion.

In one remarkable sentence Goethe describes the peculiarity of their situation. "We are indeed married," he wrote to her, "that is, knit by a bond, the warp of which is woven of love and joy; the woof of crosses, trouble, and misery." The effect of this recurring strain on Goethe was such as at times to reduce him to a state of moral enervation which found expression in words as lacking in reticence and self-respect as those of Keats to Fanny Brawne, and exhibit him as mere "passion's slave." "I am no isolated, no self-sufficing being," he told her. "All my weakness I have leaned on you; my soft sides I have guarded through you, my defects made good through you."

On June 25, 1786, Goethe wrote to Frau von Stein that he was engaged in correcting *Werther*, and added that it would not have been a bad action had its author shot himself like its hero. The remark is a striking commentary on the mental and physical strain from which he was now suffering. This strain, as we have seen, was due to many causes. His official duties during the preceding three years, and the worries connected with them, had overtaxed his strength. The society of Weimar had become so distasteful to him that he felt a moral need of breathing more freely elsewhere. The only two persons who sympathetically understood him were Herder

and Frau von Stein, and even with these two his relations were not uniformly such as to compensate for the irksomeness of his general surroundings. His intercourse with Frau von Stein, indeed, had ceased to be a refreshment and a stimulus, and the demands that each made on the other were a constant source of morbid irritation to both. His mental and physical condition thus urged the necessity of an immediate flight from Weimar, and there was another impulse that constrained him to the same step. Since his earliest boyhood it had been the dream of his life that he would one day visit Italy. His father had in his youth travelled in that country, and the memories of his visit and the specimens of Italian art he had brought home with him were among the son's earliest and deepest impressions. With the growth of his mind and the widening of his intellectual interests the desire to know Italy grew into a passion. For years before he was able to gratify his longing, he tells us, he dared not open a Latin book on account of the painful feelings it suggested.

More than once during the preceding ten years he had thoughts of leaving Weimar, at least for a time, but his ties with Frau von Stein and his sense of obligation to complete the official reforms he had undertaken had restrained him. In the summer of 1786, however, he could assure himself that he had done his task as the Duke's Minister, and the conviction was borne in upon him that it was in the interest both of Frau von Stein and of himself that they should temporarily be apart. In July he had made up his mind for flight; on the 12th of that month he told Jacobi, then in England, that he would be gone from Weimar on Jacobi's return. His manner of leave-taking was characteristic. At the end of August he spent a few pleasant days with the Duke, Herder, and Frau von Stein at Carlsbad, where he had gone ostensibly for the benefit of his health.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This was his second visit to Carlsbad. Subsequently it became his usual place of resort when he needed rest and refreshment.

By September 2 all his friends had left him, and the following day, without a hint of his destination to any one except his servant Philipp Seidel, he set out on the journey which, in his own and the world's opinion, was to be the most memorable experience of his life. Before going he wrote three letters to the persons in Weimar to whom he was bound by the strongest ties—to Herder, the Duke, and Frau von Stein. To Herder he wrote that the memory of his affection and his fidelity would accompany him, and that he looked forward with joyful hope to their future meeting.<sup>1</sup> Of the Duke he begged forgiveness for his mysterious flight, adding that he had left the public business in such train that his services were no longer needed. In his parting letter to Frau von Stein there were words which were of doubtful omen for their future relations. "I have hitherto," he wrote, "suffered many things in silence, and have desired nothing so passionately as that our relations may be so regulated as that no violence can do them harm." It was one of the many results of Goethe's Italian journey that it occasioned a breach with Frau von Stein which was never to be healed.

<sup>1</sup> During the summer of 1786 Herder had done Goethe an important service in assisting him in the preparation of a complete edition of his works, which Goethe had arranged with the publisher Göschen. At the date when Goethe left Weimar, Herder was hesitating regarding an invitation he had received to settle in Hamburg.



## CHAPTER XIX

### LITERARY PRODUCTION DURING THE FIRST WEIMAR PERIOD

WAS it a gain or a loss to the world and to himself that Goethe passed eleven years of the most productive period of a man's life in a petty town, in the circle of a petty Court? Under other conditions which might have enabled him to develop his genius more freely and naturally, would he have produced work at once more abundant and of higher quality? Would his genius have taken the bent it did, under influences other than those to which he was subjected at Weimar? On these questions his own countrymen are divided in opinion, and, as we have seen, Goethe was at variance with himself regarding the wisdom of his choice in becoming a courtier and an official. Now he would lead us to believe that he had found the sphere and the work specifically fitted to remedy the natural defects of his character and, therefore, more sanely and more effectively to direct and concentrate his creative powers. At other times, it was borne in upon him with bitter self-reminder that he had missed his way, and that nature's best gifts to him were being thwarted and wasted to his own and the world's loss. Such questions are of necessity unanswerable; no analysis can give a net conclusion regarding the action and reaction between the human spirit and its environment. Regret has often been expressed that during these ten years Goethe produced so little, that he conceived, planned, and began great things, only to drop them in succession. But from what we know of his powers of

production both before and after his first Weimar period, are we justified in thinking that his genius would have been more prolific under other conditions? His pre-Weimar period is strewn with as many abortive fragments as the years that immediately followed, and in later life we find the same fitful and intermittent inspiration. And he was himself keenly conscious of this characteristic. "Without compulsion," he wrote to Wieland, in his fortieth year, "there is in my case no hope," and at the age of sixty-two he said of himself that "it was his habit to announce and not to perform, to promise and not to fulfil." Be it said, however, that, though during these first Weimar years he published no work that took the world by storm as *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Werther* had done, there belong to them not a few things that have passed into European literature and are among the richest jewels in his poetic crown. Moreover, as we shall see, the early years of Goethe's settlement in Weimar were not so barren as had been supposed, for recent fortunate discovery has brought to light a work, produced during that time, which will henceforth take rank among the more important efforts of his genius.

His productions during the period may be regarded under three divisions, each representing the different interests that preoccupied him. We have a succession of short poems, pieces of a dramatic character, and works in prose. It is in the short poems that we have at once the finest expression of his poetic gift and the fullest revelation of the workings of his mind and heart. They may be classed under three heads—poems inspired by love, ballads, and reflective poems on life and art. In all three classes there are examples of thought, feeling, and imagination so welded by art that they are among the world's permanent possessions.

During his first months in Weimar, Lili Schöne-mann was not wholly forgotten by Goethe. He had broken with her for ever, but some scars remained

of a passion that had strained his nature to the point of distraction. As late as the beginning of 1776, some three months after he had parted from her, he sent her a copy of his *Stella* with these lines, which read strangely in view of their existing relations—

Im holden Thal, auf schneebedeckten Höhen  
 War stets dein Bild mir nah :  
 Ich sah's um mich, in lichten Wolken wehen ;  
 Im Herzen war mir's da.  
 Empfinde hier, wie mit allmächt'gem Triebe  
 Ein Herz das andre zieht,  
 Und dass vergebens Liebe  
 Vor Liebe flieht !

In the dear vale, on heights the snow-wreaths cover,  
 Still was thine image near :  
 I saw it round me in the bright clouds hover ;  
 My heart beheld it there.  
 Here learn to feel with what resistless power  
 One heart the other ties ;  
 That vain it is when lover  
 From lover flies !

But when Goethe wrote these lines, the memory of Lili Schönemann was all but effaced by the passion which was to be the most durable he ever experienced towards any woman. This passion also was to evoke outpourings addressed to its object, but they were of a nature necessarily different in kind from any previous expression of kindred experience. Two women—Friederike Brion and Lili Schönemann—had in the past inspired his happiest verse, but even in the case of these two the inspiration had been different and had found dissimilar notes. His songs inspired by Friederike expressed the unalloyed rapture of first love in which simple feeling was the ruling impulse. With Lili Schönemann the case was different. His relations to her were complicated by disturbing external circumstances, and she herself was not the unsophisticated being he had found in Friederike. Hence his songs addressed to her are not the pure breathings of that whole-hearted abandonment to a single emotion which is an indispensable condition of the pure lyric.



If Goethe's relations to Lili Schönemann were such as to preclude pure lyrical rapture, in far greater degree was this the case with his relations to Frau von Stein. Antecedently, her personal character and her circumstances would hardly lead us to expect that she would inspire in a lover emotions that would irresistibly seek vent in song. And, in truth, the mental experiences she evoked in Goethe were not such as to induce the lyrical mood. Their permanent attitude to each other, as we have seen, was a precarious mutual attraction, perpetually on the brink of possible estrangement. Moreover, the bond between them was not that of a love, pure and simple. It was a tie of intellect as well as of emotion, and in the poems he addresses to her it is as his discerning and sympathetic mentor that she appears no less than as the object of his soul's adoration. So it is that the poems she inspired are not purely lyrical either in form or in substance. The real keynote is rather that of elegy, as the expression of their common conviction that destiny had ruled that perfect union could never be within their reach. In lines written in the solitude of Ilmenau he gives expression to the melancholy truth—

Ach, so drückt mein Schicksal mich,  
Dass ich nach dem Unmöglichen strebe!  
Lieber Engel, für den ich nicht lebe,  
Zwischen den Gebirgen leb' ich für dich.

Ah! such impulse cruel fate doth give,  
I strive for what's beyond my lot!  
Angel love, for whom I live not,  
Amid the hills for thee I live.

The same consciousness of the gulf that separated them, and, therefore, of the mingled joy and pain that must be their lot appears in the verses, entitled *An meine Bäume*—

Sag' ich's euch, geliebte Bäume,  
Die ich ahndevoll gepflanzt,  
Als die wunderbarsten Träume  
Morgenrötlich mich umtanzt.

Ach, ihr wisst es, wie ich liebe,  
 Die so schön mich wieder liebt,  
 Die den reinsten meiner Triebe  
 Mir noch reiner wiedergiebt!

Wachset wie aus meinem Herzen,  
 Treibet in die Luft hinein!  
 Denn ich grub viel Freud und Schmerzen  
 Unter eure Wurzeln ein.

Bringet Schatten, traget Früchte,  
 Neue Freude jeden Tag,  
 Nur dass ich sie dichte, dichte,  
 Dicht bei ihr geniessen mag!

Hear it, ah! ye trees beloved,  
 That I planted, yearning-wise,  
 When such wondrous dreams at day-dawn  
 Danced before my youthful eyes.

Ah! ye know it, how I love her,  
 Who so nobly loves again,  
 Who the purest of my longings,  
 Gives me back more pure of stain.

As from out my heart upgrow ye,  
 Shoot your branches high and wide,  
 For beneath yours roots I buried  
 Joys and sorrows multiplied.

Bring ye shadow, fruits abundant,  
 Newborn joys for every day,  
 Only that, aye closer, closer,  
 I, with her, enjoy them may.

In the most remarkable lines he addressed to her—those beginning *Warum gabst du uns die tiefen Blicke*—the burden is the hardness of the fate that had led him to know one who seemed predestined to complete his own being, and from whom he was yet divided by a chasm that could not be bridged. Why, he asks, had fate granted them such a perfect understanding of each other's being, and, at the same time, such a clear insight into their true relations? The mass of mortals drive blindly through life and thoughtlessly take their joys or sorrows as they come. Only to them is such a

dream-life denied. What has fate in store for them whom it had knit in a bond so pure that in some past time she must either have been his sister or his wedded wife? And there follows the most remarkable passage in the multitude of the tributes in which he has acknowledged the debt he owed to her—

Kanntest jeden Zug in meinem Wesen,  
Spähstest, wie die reinste Nerve klingt,  
Konntest mich mit einem Blicke lesen,  
Den so schwer ein sterblich Aug' durchdringt;  
Tropfstest Mässigung dem heissen Blute,  
Richtetest den wilden, irren Lauf,  
Und in Deinen Engelsarmen ruhte  
Die zerstörte Brust sich wieder auf.

Thou knewest every feature of my being,  
No nerve, however fine, escaped thy seeing,  
Thy single glance my inmost thoughts could read,  
Though for a mortal eye 'twas hard indeed;  
Calm in my fevered blood thou didst instill,  
Guiding my wild and erring course at will,  
And ever did my poor distracted breast  
Within thine angel arms find peace and rest.

Goethe's relations to Frau von Stein were not such as to induce the mood which is the condition of lyrical poetry. Yet that he had not lost the gift which he had shown in the songs addressed to Friederike and Lili, we have conclusive proof. To these first Weimar years belong a few things—notably certain of the songs which subsequently found a place in *Wilhelm Meister*—that in exquisiteness of art and haunting pathos are unique in the whole range of his work. Appearing where they do in *Meister*, they are in perfect dramatic fitness with the two characters, the Harper and Mignon, to whom they are assigned. But in their origin they were wrung from Goethe's own heart's longings and pained self-brooding. Two of the series, respectively beginning *Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt* and *Nur wer die Sehnsucht*, are manifestly inspired by his intercourse with Frau von



Stein, but have a general implication absent from the poems directly addressed to her. The first verse of the former—

Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergiebt,  
Ach, der ist bald allein ;  
Ein jeder lebt, ein jeder liebt,  
Und lässt ihn seiner Pein,

Who gives himself to solitude,  
Ah ! he is soon alone ;  
His neighbours live, his neighbours love,  
And leave him to his moan,

is the concentrated expression of that sense of solitude, which, as we have seen, at times oppressed him in the midst of the Weimar society. So the following two verses, sung by the Harper, are the distilled essence of self-communings in his Diary, where he records his failures to attain the ideals after which he is striving, and his efforts, baffled by lack of sympathy, to realize necessary reforms in the State—

Wer nie sein Brot mit Thränen ass,  
Wer nie die kummervollen Nächte  
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass,  
Der kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen Mächte !

Ihr führt ins Leben uns hinein,  
Ihr lasst den Armen schuldig werden,  
Dann überlasst ihr ihn der Pein ;  
Denn alle Schuld rächt sich auf Erden.

Who ne'er hath ate his bread with tears ;  
Who ne'er through troubled midnight hours  
Upon his bed hath weeping lain,  
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.

Ye lead us onward into life,  
The wretch leave to his guilty way,  
Then leave him to remorse's sting ;  
For sin its debt on earth must pay.

Finally, belonging to the same period and to the same series of the *Meister* songs, we have that of Mignon, *Kennst du das Land*, which the world has recognized as one of the perfect things that have

come from men's hands. From the lips of Mignon it falls with such exquisite appropriateness that it seems the emanation of her very being. Yet, as we know, the passionate longing for Italy which the song expresses was first in Goethe's own heart, and the more deeply we enter into the mystery of its charm, the more we must marvel at the mind that produced it, for it was the same mind that addressed itself with patient sagacity to the practical work of ordering a state, and applied itself with scientific precision to the observation of nature. Be it remembered, also, that behind the passionate desire to see the land of promise, was the lifelong endeavour of which it was only the manifestation—the endeavour after the full satisfaction of all the faculties that had been vouchsafed to him. Beside these *Meister* songs, with their simplicity of form, their oneness of effect, and their soul-troubled emotion, a place is claimed by the poem entitled *An den Mond*,<sup>1</sup> beginning—

Füllest wieder Busch und Thal  
Still mit Nebelglanz,  
Lösest endlich auch einmal  
Meine Seele ganz,

Again thou floodest copse and vale,  
With brightness soft and still,  
And, freed by thee, my soul once more  
Is mistress of her will,

in which the natural objects—the moon and the stream—to which the poet refers, are, as it were, fused into the emotion that possesses him.

A place apart is due to three pieces in a kind in which Goethe is the incomparable master. They are the three ballads—*Der Fischer*, *Erlkönig*, and *Der Sänger*, all of which belong not only to German but to the world's literature. Of the three, the first two remind us of a characteristic of Goethe—an abnormal sensitiveness to suprasensual influences which he had in as marked degree as Shelley. On

<sup>1</sup> This poem did not appear in its final form till 1789.

*The Fisher*, where the nymph of the stream by her seductions induces the hero to throw himself into its depths, we have the best commentary in the passage from Goethe already quoted in connection with the drowning of the young lady in the river Ilm; "like the water itself this seductive kind of grief has something dangerously alluring in it, and the light of the stars of heaven, which shines forth from both, attracts us"—a passage which could only have been written by one with the characteristic above noted.<sup>1</sup> *Erkönig* is based on Herder's translation of a Danish folksong, but in choosing it for re-adaptation, and by the heightening touches he has given to the original, Goethe shows that the element in which the ballad moves had a fascinating attraction for one side of his nature. In the third ballad, *Der Sänger*, chanted by the Harper in *Wilhelm Meister*, we have another illustration of the range of Goethe's power in the ballad style. For sheer momentum, sweeping the reader along from the first line to the last, it has hardly its like in any other poem of Goethe's.

Among the poems of this period we have another group, which of themselves would give their author a supreme place equally as a singer and as a thinker. These are poems whose themes are "the burthen of the mystery" of things and the attitude that becomes men in confronting it. We have seen how during these first Weimar years there were two ends, the attainment of which was Goethe's persistent endeavour; the one was to achieve self-mastery, the other to acquire such a conception of man's place in the order of nature as would satisfy both his mind and his heart. At the close of the period he, on his own testimony, had not compassed the first of these ends, but of the

<sup>1</sup> In a conversation with Eckermann (November 3, 1823) Goethe gives a more prosaic interpretation of the motive of the poem. Its motive, he said, was only the inducement to bathe which comes to us in summer weather.



second it may be said that he had arrived at the conclusions which henceforth were to be the foundation of all his thinking. In nothing of his later work did he pass beyond the positions he had now reached, and for wisdom imaginatively presented the hymns (for such they are) which he now wrote, are unmatched by any similar utterances that were to follow. The vision that had opened up to him was in its first freshness, and it was with the fervour of youth still uncooled that he gave it expression.

In the passages quoted from his Diary we have seen that Goethe had a concern like that of a saint about realizing his own ideal in his daily life and action, and like some saints he has given utterance to his aspirations in occasional verses. In such lines as these, entitled *Hoffnung*, he sets before himself what must be his daily endeavour—

Schaff, das Tagwerk meiner Hände,  
Hohes Glück, dass ich's vollende!  
Lass, o lass mich nicht ermatten!  
Nein, es sind nicht leere Träume;  
Jetzt nur Stangen, diese Bäume  
Geben einst noch Frucht und Schatten.

Ye fates august! grant me the will  
My daily task-work to fulfil!  
See that I faint not by the way!  
No! life is not an empty dream;  
These trees that bare and lifeless seem  
Will yield both fruit and shade one day.

Again in the four lines (*Erinnerung*) we are reminded of his lifelong maxim, *Hic aut nusquam*, as the only condition under which human happiness is attainable—

Willst du immer weiter schweifen?  
Sieh, das Gute liegt so nah.  
Lerne nur das Glück ergreifen,  
Denn das Glück ist immer da.

Wilt thou wander farther, farther?  
See, the good is near, so near.  
If thou learn but how to seize it,  
Happiness is always here.

Like the saints, also, he had his times of depression when the world without and within him drove him to despair and, after his own fashion, he longs for "perfect peace."<sup>1</sup> In the lines already referred to, written at Ilmenau in September, 1780, he has expressed this mood for all time—

Ueber allen Gipfeln  
Ist Ruh,  
In allen Wipfeln  
Spürest du  
Kaum einen Hauch;  
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.  
Warte nur; balde  
Ruhest du auch.

In the two hymns, respectively entitled *Grenzen der Menschheit* and *Das Göttliche*, Goethe gave final expression to the philosophy of life, in accordance with which he thenceforth sought at once to direct his intelligence and to regulate his action. In the former he defines the limits imposed on human thought and action in the presence of natural law. Only by observing these limits can man plant his feet firmly on earth and pursue his aims with steadfast purpose. If he presumes to measure himself with the gods and to soar into aerial regions, he becomes but the sport of winds and clouds. What divides gods from men? It is—

Dass viele Wellen  
Vor jenen wandeln,  
Ein ewiger Strom;  
Uns hebt die Welle,  
Verschlingt die Welle;  
Und wir versinken.

Ein kleiner Ring  
Begrenzt unser Leben,  
Und viele Geschlechter  
Reihen sich dauernd  
An ihres Daseins  
Unendliche Kette.

<sup>1</sup> We have the same longing for peace expressed in the *Wanderers Nachtlied*, beginning—

Der du von dem Himmel bist.

That many billows  
Before them roll,  
A flow everlasting;  
We are tossed by the billows,  
Engulfed by the billows;  
And we sink, overwhelmed.

A tiny circle  
Hems in our life,  
And one generation  
Follows another,  
Linked in the endless  
Chain of their being.

In the implication of the whole poem we may see a warning of which Goethe himself felt the need. He had in his own nature something of the weakness which he deplored in Byron—the *Hang zum Unbegrenzten*, the straining after the unlimited. It was Faust's rebellion against the limits imposed on man by the course of nature that attracted Goethe to the legend as a framework in which to embody his own experience. "I, also," he says in his Autobiography, "had wandered at large through all the fields of knowledge, and its futility had early enough been shown to me. In life also I had experimented in all manner of ways, and always returned more dissatisfied and distracted than ever." As in the study of nature he had the impulse to occult inquiries, so in religion he had movements towards mysticism which he held it wise to hold in check.<sup>1</sup> To what both these tendencies might lead he had seen exemplified in Lavater, who was losing himself more and more in religious fantasies and in the trickeries of charlatans like Cagliostro. Goethe was, in truth, already at the point of view which he subsequently expressed in his famous saying that "man is not born to solve the problems of this world, but rather to discover the limit where the problem

<sup>1</sup> At this period Goethe was interested in Swedenborg, of whom he writes as follows to Lavater: "Ich bin geneigter als jemand, noch eine Welt ausser der sichtbaren zu glauben, und ich habe Lebens- und Dichtungskraft genug sogar mein eigenes Selbst zu einem Schwedenborgischen Geisteruniversum erweitert zu sehen."



begins, and then to keep within the limits of the comprehensible."

In *Grenzen der Menschheit* Goethe emphasizes the distinction between gods and men; in *Das Göttliche* he shows how man may make himself truly divine even within the limitations of his earthly existence. Man has one glory and privilege that belongs to him alone among created beings; he has the power of self-direction to active beneficence—

Edel sei der Mensch,  
Hülfreich und gut!  
Denn das allein  
Unterscheidet ihn  
Von allen Wesen,  
Die wir kennen.

Let man be noble,  
Helpful and good!  
For that alone  
Marketh him off  
From all the beings  
Of whom we have knowledge.

Nature is indifferent to all man's strivings; the sun shines equally on the good and the evil; the elements regardlessly work havoc on each and all; fortune blindly gropes among old and young, innocent and guilty; and man fulfils his being, subject to "eternal, iron, mighty laws." Nevertheless, man has it in his power to live nobly for himself and his fellows—

Nur allein der Mensch  
Vermag das Unmögliche;  
Er unterscheidet,  
Wählet und richtet;  
Er kann dem Augenblick  
Dauer verleihen.

Er allein darf  
Den Guten lohnen,  
Den Bösen strafen,  
Heilen und retten,  
Alles Irrende, Schweifende  
Nützlich verbinden.

Und wir verehren  
Die Unsterblichen,  
Als wären sie Menschen,  
Thäten im grossen,  
Was der Beste im kleinen  
Thut oder möchte.

Der edle Mensch  
Sei hilfreich und gut !  
Unermüdet schaff' er  
Das Nützliche, Rechte,  
Sei uns ein Vorbild  
Jener geahneten Wesen !

Mankind alone  
May achieve the impossible ;  
Man alone is discerning,  
And chooses and judges ;  
He can duration  
Give to the moment.

He alone may  
The worthy reward,  
Punish the wicked,  
Heal and deliver,  
All blindness and error  
Bind to his service.

And we pay reverence,  
To the immortals,  
As if they were human,  
Doing in great things  
What the best man in little  
Does or would do.

Let him who is noble,  
Be helpful and good,  
Tireless produce  
The useful, the fitting ;  
Be our ensample  
Of the beings we guess at.<sup>1</sup>

In Goethe's conception, therefore, it is in the active rather than in the contemplative life that man best manifests his divinity, and it was a conception compact with his whole nature. While still a

<sup>1</sup> George Meredith called *Das Göttliche* the noblest psalm in existence.

student in Strassburg, he had described to Fräulein von Klettenberg, with obvious approval, his friend Dr. Salzmann's creed, "that we are specially put into this world to be useful to it, that we can make ourselves capable of this, an end to which religion also gives some help in attaining; and that what is of the greatest use is best." That Goethe strove to live up to this creed we have seen in both his public and his private action.

If we are to accept his own interpretation, the conclusion to which the dark fragment, *Die Geheimnisse*, was to lead was identical with the implications of the two poems just noted. As originally conceived, *Die Geheimnisse* was to be a great religious epic whose theme should be the spiritual aspiration of humanity after a faith that would embody man's highest instincts and conceptions. In the fragment we possess we find a mode of thinking that was to grow upon Goethe with advancing years, and that had for its root his conviction expressed in the *Chorus Mysticus* at the conclusion of the Second Part of *Faust*—

Alles vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichniss.

The reader of the poem is warned from the first that, "with the aid of all his senses," he need not hope wholly to understand "the wonderful song," and in allegorical fashion the song begins. A weary pilgrim, Brother Marcus, is wending his way at nightfall through a remote valley, cheered by the hope that he will find a hospitable resting-place. Ascending by devious paths the steep mountain in front of him, he reaches the summit, where in a pleasant valley he sees a beautiful building, at that moment touched by the rays of the setting sun. On his approach, a singular object arrests his attention—a cross garlanded with roses fixed on the arch over the closed gateway. At the sight of the symbol, "that stands for consolation and hope to all the



world," the heart of the pilgrim is softened and cheered. On his knocking, the door is opened, and he is received as an honoured guest, and is immediately besought by his hosts to tell his tale. This he does, and his reverend appearance, and the words of deep wisdom he utters hold his hearers spellbound in awe. His tale told, an aged man bids him welcome, and informs him that he has come at a moment when the community is in deep sorrow. Their head, whose name is Humanus, who had hitherto been their inspirer and consoler, was about to depart, but how or when, he refused to inform them. Their community consisted only of world-weary men who had found a restful haven in their present abode and under his guidance. And here follows a sketch of the old man's past history, in which incidents are curiously drawn from Pagan and Christian traditions. His story finished, Brother Marcus is conducted by the company into a great chamber devoid of ordinary ornament, but provided with thirteen seats, each with a desk in front of it and an escutcheon suspended behind. The most conspicuous object in the chamber was a cross garlanded with roses, and there were also to be seen coats of arms, weapons of every description, and even chains and bonds. Each taking possession of a seat, the brothers pass some time in devotion, intoning hymns, and, then departing, leave Marcus alone with the old man. Wearied though he is with his day's toil, Marcus further examines the mysterious objects around him, and is specially struck by the sight of the garlanded cross set between a fiery-coloured dragon, quenching its thirst in flames, and an arm in the jaws of a bear from which the blood gushed in streams. He is told that the mysteries will subsequently be revealed to him, for, though he has as yet entered merely the fore-court, he is found worthy to enter the innermost. After a short night's rest he is awakened by the sound of a bell, and hastens to the building whence the sound

comes, but only to find the door barred. Proceeding to a window, he sees a wonderful sight—three youths bearing torches, clad in white, crowned with flowers, and with roses wound round their girdles. With mien, as “if they came from a midnight revel,” they hasten through the garden and extinguish their torches as they go.

Here the fragment ends, and from this sketch of it we may infer what would have been the general character of the poem, had it been completed. At its close the reader is disposed to acquiesce in the poet's warning that, “with the aid of all his senses,” he will be unable to fathom its full import. Many years later (1815) Goethe was requested by a students' union at Königsberg to enlighten them as to the hidden meaning of the “enigmatic production,” as he himself calls it. It cannot be said that his explanation is illuminating. The community of brethren, he explains, is to be regarded as a kind of “ideal Montserrat,” to which the brothers have come from all ends of the earth to worship God after their own conceptions. The twelve different religions which they represented had developed under divers conditions, and the brothers were gradually to learn from Humanus the highest religion attainable by man—its crowning symbol being the cross garlanded with roses. After the community had been fully instructed, Humanus was to leave them, but, as they could not subsist without a head, Brother Marcus was to take his place, and it is in his qualifications for the position that we seem to catch a glimpse of what was to be the essential teaching of the poem. Marcus, we are told, was chosen for the exalted position as one “who, without wide outlook, without straining after the unattainable, by humility, resignedness, and faithful labours, deserved well in the pious circle.” In these qualifications of Marcus, it will be seen, we have embodied the teaching of *Grenzen der Menschheit* and *Das Göttliche*—that the highest ideal for man is beneficent activity

on the one hand, and, on the other, the direction of intellect within the limits imposed by natural law. Of special significance for the interpretation of Goethe's meaning is his choice of the cross garlanded with roses as the symbol of the highest religion. That highest religion was to be grounded on Christianity, but a Christianity freed equally from morbid asceticism and from scholastic dogma. What Goethe understood by such a Christianity we have seen from one of his communications to Herder; it was to be found in the Epistle of John, "which comprehends Moses and the Prophets, the Evangelists and the Apostles." Here, be it said, we are in touch with the governing idea in Goethe's outlook on life. In the burden of the Apostle John's teaching, that love is the essence of religion, he found the only condition under which man's highest life can be lived and his intelligence fruitfully applied.<sup>1</sup> Love implies genial relations to men and things as we find them, and only with this attitude can they be understood and appreciated. In Goethe's choice of the name *Humanus* for the spiritual director of the community we have the same suggestion as in the garlanded cross. The crowning religion was to embody the highest ideal of humanity, *reine Menschlichkeit*, in Goethe's own favourite phrase borrowed from Herder<sup>2</sup>—a religion not supernaturally revealed, but the effluence of man's own nature and its aspirations.

To the poem *Ilmenau*, in which Goethe speaks as statesman and counsellor of the Duke, reference has already been made. In two others of some length we see him under different lights. In the first of these, *Auf Miedings Tod*, we have a memorial of another of his many activities—his directorship of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *Wanderlied* in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*—

Und dein Streben—sei's in Liebe,  
Und dein Leben sei die That.

<sup>2</sup> In his conception of *Humanus*, Goethe had Herder and his teaching in his mind,



amateur theatre in Weimar. Mieding had been the *factotum* in connection with the mechanical arrangements of the theatre, and Goethe pays a touching tribute to his unselfish zeal and his infinite device in the discharge of his duties. Specially noteworthy in the poem are two passages—the one referring to the peculiar lot and characteristics of Weimar,<sup>1</sup> and the other to Corona Schröter. At once for its own beauty and as a characterization of the woman in whom Goethe saw all the attractions he would have desired in a wife, the latter passage deserves to be quoted—

Ihr Freunde, Platz! Weicht einen kleinen Schritt!  
 Seht, wer da kommt und festlich näher tritt!  
 Sie ist es selbst; die Gute fehlt uns nie;  
 Wir sind erhört, die Musen senden sie.  
 Ihr kennt sie wohl; sie ist's, die stets gefällt;  
 Als eine Blume zeigt sie sich der Welt;  
 Zum Muster wuchs das schöne Bild empor,  
 Vollendet nun, sie ist's und stellt es vor.  
 Es gönnten ihr die Musen jede Gunst,  
 Und die Natur erschuf in ihr die Kunst.  
 So häuft sie willig jeden Reiz auf sich,  
 Und selbst dein Name ziert, *Corona*, dich!<sup>2</sup>

My friends, make room! Move back a little space!  
 Behold, who comes with stately, solemn pace!  
 'Tis she herself! Heaven's grace is with us still;  
 Our prayers are heard; it is the Muses' will.  
 Ye know her well; your hearts she ever holds;  
 Even as a flower, her beauty she unfolds;  
 To be a type, the lovely image grew;  
 Completed now, she shows herself to you.  
 On her the Muses every grace did shower,  
 With Art the hand of Nature did her dower.  
 So, gladly doth she make each charm her own,  
 And even thy name, *Corona*, is a crown!

The interest of the other poem, *Hans Sachsens*

<sup>1</sup> The passage beginning—

O Weimar! dir fiel ein besonder Loos!  
 Wie Bethlehem in Juda, klein und gross.

<sup>2</sup> Frau von Stein, we have seen, was jealous of Corona. In sending these lines to her Goethe expressed the hope that she would find nothing in them to offend her.

*poetische Sendung*, is more closely personal. To Sachs, the shoemaker-poet of Nuremberg and the hearty supporter of Luther, Goethe had been early attracted by his homely good sense, his cheery humour and his directness of speech, and had even found inspiration in his doggerel verse, which he had imitated with striking effect in his pre-Weimar dramas, and notably in the fragment, *Der Erwige Jude*. As Carlyle has said, it is a "Hans Sachs beatified" who is presented in the poem; the "mission" to which Hans is called is the projection of Goethe's own poetical ideal and of his own personal experience at the period when the poem was written. The special gifts which he attributes to Sachs are precisely those exhibited in Goethe's own early work—

Er hätt' ein Auge treu und klug,  
 Und wär' auch liebevoll genug,  
 Zu schauen manches klar und rein,  
 Und wieder alles zu machen sein.  
 Hätt' auch eine Zunge, die sich ergoss,  
 Und leicht und fein in Worte floss;  
 Des thäten die Musen sich erfreun,  
 Wollten ihn zum Meistersänger weihn.

His eye was true and keen, it seemed,  
 And he had love enow, he deemed,  
 To keep his vision clear and sane,  
 And make it all his own again.  
 A tongue was his, swift to express  
 His thought in simplest, choicest dress;  
 The muses, pleased and charmed, decree,  
 He shall a Mastersinger be.

So in the first three visions that appear to Hans we have Goethe's own conception of the scope and function of the poet, as in the last (which assumes the form of Hans's second wife) we have a transcript of his own experience in his intercourse with Frau von Stein—

Mit Necken und manchen Schelmereien  
 Wirst ihn bald nagen, bald erfreuen,  
 So wird die Liebe nimmer alt,  
 Und wird der Dichter nimmer kalt!

With pranks and roguish pleasantries  
 Wilt now him cheer, and now him tease ;  
 And so love never will grow old,  
 And never will the bard wax cold.

One of Goethe's many activities at the Weimar Court, as we have seen, was that of purveying theatrical entertainments—then the rage at all the German Courts. His hand was not new to this work, as in Frankfort he had composed pieces, whose primary object was ephemeral amusement.<sup>1</sup> Slight as most of the things he now produced were, therefore, they were not merely written to order. In writing them he had a serious object in view—to provide Germany with literary *genres* to be found in other literatures, but hitherto not cultivated at home. And this object was only part of a larger aim which he never lost sight of amid all his multifarious interests. It was his strenuous endeavour to create a national theatre as an agency of national culture for elevating the pleasures of the people, in the conception of both Goethe and Schiller the most effectual means of raising the tone of a nation. That the theatre fills so large a place in the life of the German people is largely due to Goethe's initiative and persistent efforts.

Two years before Goethe's arrival in Weimar the town theatre had been burned to the ground,<sup>2</sup> and there was now no professional troupe attached to the Court. As the courtiers could not dispense with theatrical entertainments, however, they formed an amateur company of which the Duke, his mother, the Duchess Amalia, Goethe, and other leading personages were members. The company took its business seriously and rehearsed their parts indefatigably, and no pains or expense were spared in providing costume and the appropriate stage decorations. And there were other excitements connected with the production of the various pieces. When weather

<sup>1</sup> *Erwin und Elmire* and *Claudine von Villa Bella*.

<sup>2</sup> A new one was built in 1780.



permitted, the performances were given out of doors—on the banks of the Ilm, in the park at Weimar or at the neighbouring Tiefurt, Ettersburg, or Belvedere. Nor did the company confine its representations to Weimar and its neighbourhood; they travelled as far as Ilmenau and Dornburg, one of the Duke's residences near Jena, and there was much byplay not strictly connected with their theatrical performances.

Of the completed theatrical pieces which Goethe produced during this period, there are none that, even in the estimation of his own countrymen, have a place among his greater works. Yet to one group of them, at least, he gave his best endeavour to make them works of art in their own kind. These were his *Singspiele*, with which he made a serious attempt to introduce the musical drama into Germany. Of the toil and thought which he gave to the production of these operas, his letters to his friend, the musician Philipp Christoph Kayser, are the interesting memorial. In those letters he discusses at length the conditions requisite to the success of that form of stage-play. Nearly a hundred years before, Dryden had considered the same problem in the Preface to his *Albion and Albanus*, which he claimed to be the first opera written in English, and what is interesting is, that both saw the same difficulties and both arrived at the same conclusion regarding the relations of the musician and the poet in their joint work of producing an effective drama. Both found themselves at the same disadvantage in the nature of their respective languages as compared with that of Italy—the country where the musical drama had found its peculiar home. The appropriate forms of verse and the substance of the prose text equally exercised the minds of both. With regard to the latter point, Dryden's conclusion is that, "the principal intention" of the opera "being to please hearing rather than to gratify the understanding," he has no need to apologize for "the meanness of thought" in his own

attempt, and Goethe, both by precept and practice, showed that he was of the same opinion. "It is my part to invent," said Dryden of his relation to the composer, "and the musician's to humour that invention"; and Goethe speaks to much the same effect. "He who writes words for a musical piece," he says, "when he hands his work over to the composer, must regard it as a son or a pupil, whom he is devoting to the service of a new master." Neither Dryden nor Goethe, both distinguished as poets by their strong sense, was naturally fitted to produce the trivial *libretti* which they considered a necessity of successful musical drama.

A few words may suffice to indicate the nature of the themes on which Goethe exercised his ingenuity in this form of composition. The musical plays are four in all—*Lila*, *Jery und Bätely*, *Die Fischerin*, and *Scherz, List, und Rache*. The first-named, *Lila*, was composed in the autumn of the year following his arrival in Weimar, and was prompted by a motive which suggests curious reflections on the variations of taste. As has been said, there was permanent estrangement between Carl August and his wife, and all the world knew it. With the laudable motive of improving their relations Goethe produced this play, of which the theme is the alienation that had arisen between a baron and his helpmate. A prey to diseased fancies, she shuns the presence of her husband and all those about him, and one physician after another has failed to restore her to her right mind. At length a magus presents himself, who makes the ingenious suggestion that her hypochondriacal fancies should be presented to her in bodily form. The result was a complete success—the appearance of an ogre in the third Act being the most effectual agent in accomplishing it. Of the musical portions of the play only one song has a place in the list of Goethe's best-known lyrics—the song beginning—

Feiger Gedanken  
Bängliches Schwanken.

*Jery und Bätely* was written in December, 1779, on Goethe's way home from his visit to Switzerland in company with the Duke. The scene is laid among the mountains of the Canton Uri, though there is no local colour in the piece; and the characters are four in number—a father, a daughter, her lover, and a strolling soldier. The theme is the unwillingness of the daughter to accept any of her numerous suitors—even Jery, for whom she has a preference. It is in vain that she is warned that it is unsafe for her to be alone in such a solitude when her father is absent. The appearance of the soldier is the decisive event of the play. Finding Bätely (the daughter) alone, he behaves rudely to her, raises a fracas, and in a tussle with Jery, who appears on the scene, lays him low. Bätely is thus effectually convinced of the need of a protector, and she enthusiastically throws herself into Jery's arms. Of intellectual interest, it will be seen, the play is void, and the bursts of song with which the prose dialogue is diversified hardly rise above a musical jingle.

In a higher strain is *Die Fischerin*, written in 1782. There are three characters in it—a father, a daughter, and her lover. The play opens with Dortchen (the daughter) in the cottage singing the *Erbkönig*. The song ended, she soliloquizes. She has been long plagued by the dilatoriness of her lover and father in returning to the evening meal, and she resolves to play them such a trick as will give them a lesson for the future. Seeing them in the distance, dawdling as usual, she leaves the cottage and conceals herself. The two fishermen arrive, and Dortchen is not to be found. The father takes her absence philosophically, but the lover (Niklas) is in agony lest she has been drowned, as her hat, hung on a neighbouring bush, seems to suggest. The alarm is raised, the neighbours flock to the cottage, and search is made in vain, when Dortchen presents herself with many apologies for the prank she has played. But the strain on the nerves of the two lovers has



had its effect, and there and then it is decided that they will tie the knot on the morrow. The first note struck in the play by Dortchen's singing of the eerie *Erlkönig* leads the reader to expect that supersensual influences will give a character to the action, but this is not the case. Niklas, in his distress at the disappearance of Dortchen, conjures up the possibility of the malign interference of the spirits of the deep, but in a casual fashion that does not touch the imagination; and the main thread of interest turns on Dortchen's prank.<sup>1</sup>

The last of Goethe's attempts in this kind, *Scherz, List, und Rache*, introduces us to as unpleasant company as his earlier comedy, *Die Mitschuldigen*. Its characters, knaves all, are a quack doctor, Scapin, and Scapine—names taken over from Italian comedy. The doctor has defrauded Scapin and Scapine of a legacy, and they lay a plot to recover it. The doctor finds Scapin at his doorstep in the guise of a lame beggar, and takes him as a servant on the assurance that he could exist without food. As arranged, Scapine presents herself as a patient, and the doctor is fascinated by her attractive appearance. In the course of the interview, by Scapin's previous suggestion, she shams dying on drinking a potion. The doctor loses his head in his alarm, and, with the threat that they will charge him publicly with poisoning, the precious two extort the amount of the legacy from him. The piece, it will be seen, is pure farce, and an unpleasant farce, unredeemed by a suggestion of healthy humour or good feeling. It is a remark frequently made by Goethe, at different periods of his life, that misdirection of talent is a snare from which few escape. In producing such things as these *Singspiele* he was himself surely exemplifying its truth.

Three dreams in prose belong to the same period,

<sup>1</sup> Besides *Erlkönig* Goethe appropriated four other ballads from Herder's *Volkslieder*. The piece was played at Tiefurt on the banks of the Ilm, Corona Schröter taking the part of Dortchen.

but, like the *Singspiele*, are hardly worthy of Goethe's genius. The first in time, *Die Geschwister*, was written in the autumn of the year following his settlement in Weimar (1776). Its theme, inspired by his relations to Frau von Stein, is of a nature repellent to normal feeling, and Goethe's choice of it illustrates his own turbid state of mind at the time. It is in one act, and there are only three persons concerned. Wilhelm, the principal character, represented as a worried man of business, had once loved a widow named Charlotte (the choice of the name is suggestive), whom he had been unable to marry for want of means. Dying, she committed to his charge her only child, a daughter, Marianne, whom he rears in his own home as his sister. In this relation they live together, and in due course Wilhelm conceives a passion for his *protégée*, while she continues to regard him with sisterly affection. The third person of the piece, Fabrice, an intimate friend of Wilhelm's, a constant visitor at the house, falls in love with Marianne, and at length makes a declaration, which she does not decidedly reject, but refers him to her imagined brother. Wilhelm, on being told by Fabrice of Marianne's conditional consent, falls into violent emotion, which Fabrice is naturally unable to understand. On his leaving the house, Marianne appears and vehemently assures Wilhelm that she will never leave him; and under the strain of his feelings he reveals their true relation, to the satisfaction of both. In this moment of paroxysm Fabrice reappears and is at first indignant, but when he learns the true state of the case, he is perfectly reconciled, and the play ends with this remarkable *éclaircissement*. Comment on the theme and its development is unnecessary, yet, poor as the play is if regarded as a work of art, it has its own interest as showing that imperative need of bracing and purifying his inward life of which Goethe himself was so keenly conscious.

More wholesome in its tendency, though of little dramatic or poetic merit, is *Der Triumph der*

*Empfindsamkeit*, written in 1778, but modified in 1786. Its object was to ridicule the prevalent sentimentalism of the period, which, originated by the writings of Rousseau and Richardson, had become epidemic through the influence of *Werther*. Goethe had been painfully reminded of the mischievous effect of Werther's example on certain minds. He had keenly felt the fate of the young woman who was found drowned in the Ilm with a copy of *Werther* in her pocket, and he had seen in Plessing another example of a mind paralysed by abandonment to morbid fancies. He himself described the play in which he sought to throw ridicule on overstrained sentiment as "a comic opera as mad and coarse as possible," and the description fitly characterizes it. As an indication of its general character, it may suffice to mention the climax of the action. The central interest of the whole turns on the love of Prince Oromaro for the wife of King Andrason, and the discovery is made that the prince, as part of his travelling luggage, carried about with him a figure stuffed with chopped straw, and dressed in the Queen's usual habit. The play was professedly an imitation of Aristophanes, but, as Goethe himself knew, it is the coarsest of daubs in comparison with its models.

Also an imitation of Aristophanes is *Die Vögel* (1780), a general satire in which Goethe lays about him with something of the vigour he had shown in earlier things of the same kind. Two citizens, Treu-freund and Hoffegut, discontented with all the conditions in their native town, set forth to consult the owl as an oracle of wisdom. They are received by the owl's attendant, the parrot, who summons his master. On laying their complaints before the oracle, they are told that they are a couple of fools for thinking that the world can be other than it is. On the owl's retiring in disgust, a flock of birds appears and threatens the lives of the two pilgrims. Treu-freund rises to the occasion, and with excellent fooling and quite in Goethe's earlier manner persuades them



that they are the oldest, best, and most powerful of created beings, and ends by inducing them to build a city worthy of them, over which Treufreund is to preside as its ruler. The play is a general satire on the literature of the time, but its keenest hits are directed against Berlin and Frederick the Great. We have seen how unpleasantly Goethe had been impressed by the society of Berlin on the occasion of his visit there in company with the Duke. And he had personal reasons for disliking the place. The Berlin critics had mocked at *Götz* and *Werther*, and the great Frederick had written a contemptuous work on German literature in general,<sup>1</sup> and had pilloried *Götz* as "a detestable imitation of vile English pieces." It was with deliberate aim, therefore, that in *Die Vögel* Goethe sarcastically referred to Frederick's method of taxing his people, and to the Prussian Black Eagle as typifying pride and truculence. "We wish," says one of the birds, "that you would do less honour to the Eagle; we can hardly put up with him ourselves."

In these various dramatic efforts of Goethe we have no indication of the moral and intellectual striving which engaged his heart and mind during the years of their production. It is in two other of his plays, neither of which attained their final form in this period, that we find the full revelation of his deepest personal experience, and, at the same time, the new ideals he had conceived of human perfection and of the conditions of the highest artistic effect. These productions were *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Tasso*, which, as eventually transformed, were to have a place among the chief of his creations. During this period *Iphigenie* was written in full in poetic prose, and was played in the open air on the banks of the Ilm, Goethe taking the part of Orestes and Corona Schröter that of Iphigenie.<sup>2</sup> A beginning was also

<sup>1</sup> Goethe wrote a reply to Frederick which has not been preserved.

<sup>2</sup> The striking physical beauty of the pair made a great impression on the spectators.

made with *Tasso*, likewise in prose, but, as both plays were to be materially affected by a new inspiration, an account of them will best be reserved till we have them before us in their final form.

It is pre-eminently as a poet that Goethe is known to the world, yet by two works in prose, *Wilhelm Meister* and *Elective Affinities*, he has held a place among the great writers of fiction. To these two works a recent fortunate discovery has added a third, which alike by its intrinsic power and its biographical interest will henceforth rank among his chief productions. The reappearance of this work is one of the interesting incidents in literary history. It had long been known that *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was a later development of an earlier work, entitled *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission*. The latter is first mentioned by Goethe in his Diary under the date February, 1777, and in the successive years previous to his flight to Italy in 1786 there is frequent reference to it both in the Diary and in his letters. In view of the length of time it engaged him and of the labour he gave to it, it would seem that he regarded it as the most important creation of his first Weimar period. Its value from a biographical point of view is that, like *Werther*, it marks a stage in his mental growth—a stage when a new inspiration, new intellectual interests and a widened experience demanded a new expression of himself in some creative effort. Regarded on its own merits, *Wilhelm Meister's Theatralische Sendung*<sup>1</sup> is a notable addition to imaginative literature. Like the *Urfaust*, also a happy recovery, it displays powers which are to be found in the same measure in no other work of Goethe. As the fullest record of himself in literary form for this period of his development, it, therefore, calls for special notice.

From beginning to end the work is true to its title—the hero's "theatrical mission." The first awakened

<sup>1</sup> There is an excellent translation of it by W. Gregory A. Page (London, Heinemann, 1913).

interest of Wilhelm as a child is in a puppet-show provided by his grandmother. From the moment of the spectacle his bent is taken, and his one engrossing passion is to produce similar things. As a child, he devises puppet-shows in which he enlists the interest of his companions; as a youth, he devours such dramatic pieces as come in his way, and industriously imitates them. When a travelling company visits the town, he assiduously attends its performances, and at this point comes a crisis in his life. He falls in love with one of the actresses, whom he subsequently discovers to have another swain. As in Goethe's experience with his first love, Gretchen, the result was the complete moral and physical collapse of Wilhelm. And here ends the first division of the book, less interesting than what follows, because less coherent and less varied alike in incident and in characters. From this point onward, however, the narrative never drags. The ingenious situations, the motley throng of characters, the lively talk, and, at times, the penetrating discussions on the drama, on actors and their art, provide fare as varied as it is rich.

From his torpor Wilhelm is rescued by his brother-in-law, a man of hard sense, who persuades him to undertake a journey in the interests of the family business and in the hope that he may be transformed into a normal human being. It is a vain hope; Wilhelm has hardly started on his travels before he falls in with an itinerant theatrical company, and his old passion for the stage is irresistibly reawakened. The various members of the troupe, with their respective individualities, are those with whom the readers of *Wilhelm Meister* are familiar. We have the self-seeking Melina and his sentimental helpmate; the child of nature, Philina; the unearthly Mignon, and the mysteriously pathetic Harper—all of them, it may be noted, with the same characteristics as are assigned to them in *Meister*. Wilhelm becomes more and more identified with the company; purchases stage dresses and furnishings with his own



purse, and on one occasion takes the leading part in a play of his own composing and wins the rapturous applause of the audience.

To the wild delight of the company they are invited by a nobleman, who is expecting the visit of a prince, to appear at his castle and provide his guests with entertainment. In high hopes of a distinguished reception, they arrive at the castle to find themselves treated as ordinary domestics, miserably housed, and regarded by everybody as the butt of any coarse jest or trick. Here, also, we make acquaintance with the characters who appear in *Meister*, in the same guise and with the same idiosyncrasies,—the baron and baroness, the count and countess, all futile beings, and the accomplished man of the world, Jarno, with his cold intelligence, who, as in *Meister*, opens Wilhelm's eyes to the greatness of Shakespeare. The company is at length unceremoniously dismissed, and, while under the temporary guidance of Wilhelm, they are attacked and robbed on their way to a town where they hoped to obtain employment. In the scuffle Wilhelm is wounded and is left behind, but on his recovery rejoins them at their destination. Here we make acquaintance with two persons who also figure in *Meister*—Serlo and his sister Aurelia, who persuade him to join their theatrical company. In taking this step Wilhelm definitely enters on his "theatrical mission," and here the work ends, though with distinct indications of Goethe's intention to follow up the hero's subsequent career on the stage. Laid aside on Goethe's departure for Italy, the work was not resumed till many years later, when a new conception transformed its character and aim.

As already said, *Wilhelm Meister's Theatralische Sendung*, like *Werther*, marks a stage in Goethe's mental and moral growth. Both works, alike by the characters of their respective heroes and by the incidents that befall them, are in large degree autobiographical. The emotions of *Werther* were

distinctly transcribed from Goethe's own experience, and in giving expression to them he summed up and took the measure of a whole period of his mental history. In the aim and scope of the *Theatralische Sendung* we see the distance he has travelled since he found the necessity of relief in the outpourings of *Werther*. It was not written, like *Werther*, in a few weeks "almost in a state of somnambulism," but produced deliberately during the course of many years. Nor was it written under the influence of one overpowering emotion. Its aim was to embody the conception of a youth strenuously bent on making the most of the powers nature had bestowed on him. This, as we have seen, was the all-engrossing endeavour of Goethe himself, and in working out his conception he, as in *Werther*, drew largely on the circumstances of his own life and of his own inner history. The puppet-show which excited Wilhelm's childish interest in the theatre, plays the same part in Goethe's Autobiography. To Wilhelm he assigns his own interest in literary production and specially in poetry. The reading of Shakespeare effects the same crisis in the mental history of both. Many of his own characteristics Goethe has also given to his hero. It was one of Goethe's habits to declaim his own verses in company, and so does Wilhelm. Goethe was addicted to long disquisitions on the subjects that interested him, and Wilhelm, in season and out of season, is apt to bore his listeners in the same fashion. In their susceptibility to the influence of their immediate surroundings, Wilhelm and his creator are of similar temperament. Yet Wilhelm is no more the whole Goethe than is Werther. With all his variability and susceptibility, Goethe, as we have seen, had extraordinary powers of self-recovery, and with his purely artistic aspirations he combined a capacity for apprehending the actual facts of life that made him a successful administrator. Yet, for the appreciation of him on the side which is most interesting to the world, what he put of

himself into Werther and Wilhelm is of the first importance.

One reason has already been given for Goethe's choice of the setting in which he places his hero—his conviction of the importance of the theatre as an agency in national culture. As he has himself frequently said, the only opportunity for a youth, not of the nobility, to become acquainted with a higher standard of manners was to see it embodied on the stage. But there was another reason for the choice of a theatrical setting for his hero. The conditions of the actor's life gave occasion for a freer play of the elementary instincts of human nature than any other occupation in society, and we have full demonstration of the fact in the variety and piquancy of the characters to whom we are introduced. Be it said, also, that the title Goethe chose, *Wilhelm Meister's Theatralische Sendung*, may mislead us as to the real scope and intention of the book. In point of fact, Wilhelm, it is clearly implied, has a larger aim before him than that of merely becoming an accomplished actor. That aim is in the first place to develop his own powers to the highest end he can conceive, and, in the second place, by means of the stage to show to the world the ideal which humanity is capable of attaining. The underlying intention of the *Theatralische Sendung* is, in truth, identical with that of the later *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* which grew out of it, though in the later work Goethe chose other means of embodying his idea.

Between *Werther* and the *Theatralische Sendung*, regarded as works of art, there is one notable distinction. While in *Werther* Goethe seems swept along by his theme and overmastered by it, in the *Theatralische Sendung* he is entirely master of himself, and presents the various characters and expounds their different points of view with complete objectivity. There are passages in the latter romance, indeed, and notably in the outbursts of Aurelia, which recall the rhapsodical extravagance of *Werther*,



but the general style of the narrative is restrained and pliable to the matter in hand. What also is new in Goethe's mood is the tone of irony that pervades the work, in the treatment alike of the characters and of the opinions they represent. It is with a spice of irony that even the declamations of Wilhelm are recorded, though they give expression to thoughts and sentiments which we know to have been Goethe's own. The seamy side of both persons and things, indeed, is so prominently obtruded, that we are apt to lay down the book with a feeling of disillusion. There is not one character whose collective qualities attract our full sympathy and give us a sense of pure enjoyment. With all his idealism and generous impulses the hero is so much of a simpleton that we at times become impatient with him. Mignon and the Harper are interesting and pathetic figures, but they have so little of common flesh and blood that it is intellectual curiosity rather than human interest which they excite. The specimens of the nobility that appear in the novel are insipid representatives of their order, though, as we know, it was only in that order that, in Goethe's opinion, good sense and tact were to be found happily combined. So in his presentation of actors and their world. Their pettiness of character, their selfish squabbles are depicted in a fashion expressly fitted to disenchant youthful enthusiasts with the stage as a profession, and Wilhelm's idealism is in their eyes only the simplicity of a raw youth who has been put in their way to be exploited.

The *Theatralische Sendung* bears a relation to the *Lehrjahre* similar to that of the *Urfaust* to the First Part of the completed drama. In the *Urfaust* there is an intensity of feeling and imagination which is hardly to be found in Goethe's later work. Mephistopheles, Faust, and Gretchen have in the early sketch all the lineaments with which the world is familiar; the most moving scenes of the First Part are already there, as are also most of

the memorable lines and passages which belong to universal literature. So in the *Theatralische Sendung* there are powers manifest which Goethe never afterwards displayed in the same degree. In spontaneity, in vivacity, in the continuous interest of the narrative, it is inherently superior to the *Lehrjahre*.<sup>1</sup> There is no solemn symbolism, there are none of those mysterious agents that remove the action from the world of reality. All is concrete, and the world to which we are introduced is a real world, where real human beings live and think and act. At the same time, as in the case of the *Urfaust*, the most memorable things in the *Apprenticeship* are to be found in the *Mission*. We have most of the songs of Mignon and the Harper; we have the famous criticism of *Hamlet*; and all the personages that have a living interest in the later work are already developed with all their characteristic traits. Begun in his twenty-seventh year and engaging him till his thirty-seventh, the *Theatralische Sendung* is the product of the period of a man's life when the inspiration of youth passes into maturity. And the work, as a whole, displays the qualities we naturally look for in this period of transition. The vivacity of youth is apparent in the animation of the narrative and in the presentment of the various characters, and maturity is shown in the absence of exaggerated touches, in the wide outlook on life and the world, and in the pregnant reflections that come from ripe experience and a disciplined intelligence. It may be a question whether in any of Goethe's subsequent efforts in prose fiction we find the same equipoise of reflection and inspiration.

<sup>1</sup> Wieland was strongly of this opinion.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE ITALIAN JOURNEY

1786—1788

ON September 3, "at three o'clock in the morning, I stole out of Carlsbad, as otherwise I should not have been allowed to take my leave." So Goethe begins the record of his Italian journey, undertaken in the spirit of a pilgrim to a promised land. A knapsack and a portmanteau contained all his necessities and the manuscripts he meant to complete for the edition of his works that had been arranged with Göschen. As it was his intention to travel *incognito*, he had decided to give himself out as Herr Johann Philipp Möller, merchant of Leipzig. Except his servant, Philipp Seidel, no one knew his destination.

"The principal object of my journey," Goethe subsequently told the Duke, "was to cure myself of the physical and moral maladies which tortured me in Germany and ultimately made me useless, and to quench my ardent thirst after true art"; and his record of his travels is a prolonged commentary on the truth of the statement. On his returning mental elasticity and his brightening outlook on men and things he dwells with satisfaction at every stage of his travels. The second object he set before him—to quench his ardent thirst after true art—it is important to note, as it explains what he went to see in Italy and the light in which he saw it. At the date when he started on his journey, he had made up his mind where alone "true" art was to be found; it was in



the remains of the artistic product of ancient Greece and nowhere else. In this conception of the highest ideal in art he had reverted to lessons he had received from one whom he regarded as among the most influential teachers of his youth. In his Autobiography he has told how much he owed to Friedrich Oeser, director of the Drawing Academy of Leipzig, and among the lessons he learned from Oeser was that the ideal of beauty is to be found in "simplicity and repose." But during his residence in Strassburg he had come under other influences. The study of the cathedral of that town and the teaching of Herder revolutionized his ideas equally in art and in literature, and his rhapsodical essay on German architecture, his *Götz*, and his *Werther* were the expression of his altered views. On his way home from Strassburg, however, he further tells us, the sight of some specimens of ancient art "shook his faith in northern architecture." Although it was after this experience that he produced *Götz* and *Werther*, the impression remained, and with growing maturity his natural affinities asserted themselves with increasing urgency.

The conditions of life in Weimar were such as to favour his instinctive leaning towards classical ideals. The Duke himself preferred them, and the general atmosphere of the Court tended to create a tone of reserve, which was more in accord with a restrained than with a libertine art, and which eventually produced in Goethe himself that stiff and stately external demeanour which characterized him in later years. But the impelling force that led him to find his ideals in Greece came from within; Greek art appealed to the needs of his whole nature, to his heart as well as to his mind. As we have seen, from his first years in Weimar he was convinced of the necessity of attaining self-mastery if he was to give effect to the powers that nature had vouchsafed to him, and in the simplicity and repose of the masterpieces of Greek art and literature he saw the concrete expression of

the inner harmony after which he was striving. Though their conceptions of life differed so fundamentally, Goethe was as profoundly convinced as was Milton that greatness of character is the necessary condition of producing great things in literature. It was her attitude to life as well as her ideal of art that drew Goethe to Greece; in breathing her spirit he at once ennobled the man in him and the artist. It was with these convictions already rooted in him that he began his Italian journey. With his widely receptive mind and multiplex interests he would not shut his eyes to other things, but his primary object was to see the remains of classical art, and what he saw confirmed for life the objects and ideals with which he started on his travels.

It was not for the intrinsic value of the opinions it contained that Goethe gave his *Italienische Reise* to the world; he himself speaks of its "crudeness and immaturity," and modern readers will not find it an adequate or safe guide to the artistic treasures of Italy. It was as part of his Autobiography that he published it, and as such it must be read if we are to estimate its due place in the series of his works. When, in 1813, he began to put it together, the third part of his Autobiography was on the point of publication. But, as many persons still living would be involved in the record, the part of his life which concerned his residence in Weimar could not be written. One chapter in his development, and that an all-important one, he could, however, safely transcribe as no considerations of persons restrained him—his experience in Italy. He has himself told us of what materials the narrative of his travels was composed—diaries, letters, short essays and numberless sketches. In editing them he was careful to make no alterations that would affect their authenticity as a record of his impressions at the time they were originally written, as only thus would they strictly form a part of his Autobiography. At the period when the book appeared, therefore, it did not represent the opinions

Goethe had then attained, though the fact was not realized by at least one eminent contemporary reader. Niebuhr, regarding it as a considered contribution to a study of Italy, was shocked at its coming from the hand of Goethe. "It is inconceivable," he wrote from Rome, "how Goethe could have allowed such a thing to be printed." Read, however, as Goethe intended it to be read, as a record of impressions that would ripen into deliberate opinion, the book is an invaluable aid to the understanding of the man and the literary artist as he was to live and to produce in the years that were to follow his return to Weimar.

The paramount impression we receive from Goethe's account of his travels is one of tireless activity and inexhaustible curiosity. "When I do open my eyes," is a remark he makes about himself, "I see whatever is to be seen." Few travellers have had such a training and equipment for comprehending what the works alike of nature and of man offer for intelligent observation. He was of mature age and his reading had been miscellaneous and extensive in many languages. There was hardly a department of science in which he was not interested, and his eye was trained to the habit of scientific observation. From his experience as a Minister of State he had learned how men were governed and had gained a wide survey of the manifold activities of an organized society. Lastly, he possessed as a natural gift the faculty of adapting himself to all ranks and classes of men—a necessary gift for the sympathetic understanding of other nations than one's own. The range of observation to which Goethe's notes of travel bear evidence is the proof that none of these advantages were left unused.

With Rome as the goal of his journey he had laid down the main lines of his route. Leaving Carlsbad, he successively visited Ratisbon, Munich (to which he had made a flying visit when a student at Leipzig), and Innsbruck, and he also ascended the Brenner Pass. In the Pass he had "a pretty adventure" on



which he dwells with evident pleasure, and which illustrates the spirit in which he travelled. Overtaking an itinerant harper and his daughter, he, at the request of the father, took the child beside him in the post-chaise. He was struck by her remarkable expression and her precocity, and in the course of their talk elicited her history—her prattle ending in her opening a new box containing the finery in which she was to adorn herself at the nearest fair. The meeting must have recalled to him his own Harper and Mignon to whom he had given being in his *Theatralische Sendung*.

From the Brenner he descended to Trent, noting the first vineyards by the way. It was with increasing impatience to reach his goal, but at the same time with growing exhilaration that he pursued his journey. "I am again taking an interest in the world," he notes at this stage of his travels. At Malcesine, on the shores of Lake Garda, he had an adventure which, with another incident that happened on his journey, shows his presence of mind and readiness of resource. He had sat down to sketch the ruins of an old castle when he was surrounded by a hostile crowd who took him for a spy, and one of their number seized the paper on which he was sketching and tore it in pieces. Noting that this action was disapproved, he stood erect and addressed the crowd in their own language, and dexterously turned their feelings in his favour.

At Verona (where he donned Italian dress) he saw the first example of ancient architecture in its amphitheatre, to the examination of which he devoted most of the five days he stayed in the town.<sup>1</sup> Vicenza (the home of Mignon) was his next stage, and here he spent over a week. The attractions of Vicenza were the buildings of Palladio, for whom he entertained an admiration not shared by modern connoisseurs.

<sup>1</sup> The guide-book which Goethe used in Italy was Johann Jakob Volkmann's "Historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italier" (1770-71). It has been pointed out that, where Goethe's judgments on the works of art he saw conflict with those of the present day, he for the most part follows Volkmann.

Padua (whose university buildings "despite their dignity, appalled" him) was his next stopping-place, and for a special reason his visit was memorable. In the public gardens of the town, he relates in his account of his botanical studies, he saw a magnificent specimen of a fan-palm, the formation of whose leaves threw fresh light on the problem that was now haunting him—the metamorphosis of plants.<sup>1</sup> A voyage down the Brenta, during which he made himself the most conspicuous among his fellow-travellers by acting as interpreter to two German pilgrims, brought him to Venice on September 28—the twenty-fifth day since he set out on his travels.

Venice had been an enchanted memory of Goethe's father, who had visited it in his youth, but neither now nor on the occasion of a subsequent visit does it appear to have laid such a spell on the son. He spent about three weeks in seeing the sights of the town, but, in his impatience to reach Rome, he was not in a mood to receive a deep impression from what he saw. As was the case with him throughout his tour, indeed, he was indefatigable in the use of the time at his disposal. He visited churches and picture-galleries, though he expresses no excessive admiration for the painters of the Venetian School; saw various plays, both tragedy and comedy; was present at a typical Venetian trial and at the annual high mass which the Doge and the chief men of the city attended in commemoration of the victory over the Turks. The streets he found so dirty that he devised an imaginary scheme for their cleansing. The sea he saw for the first time, and on the Lido he found certain marine plants which extended his botanical knowledge. But the notable fact connected with Goethe's sojourn in Venice is that he was now definitively alienated from Gothic architecture. Palladio was the instrument of his final conversion, and it was with a sense of

<sup>1</sup> He received from the gardener some specimens of the leaves which he "honoured like a fetish." The tree is now known as the "Palma di Goethe."

deliverance that he thanked God that he was freed once for all from the taste for the follies of Gothic art.

Leaving Venice "without reluctance,"<sup>1</sup> he proceeded to Ferrara, where for the first time in his journey he experienced a feeling of dissatisfaction—a feeling, he explains, occasioned by the contrast between its present condition and its brilliant past, and by the fact that both Tasso and Ariosto had been unhappy there. His spirits revived in Cento, whence he first caught a glimpse of the Apennines, and where he found enjoyment in the pictures of Guercino, a native of the town. At Bologna, his next stage, he saw the works of other great masters, the Carracci, Guido, Domenichino; but he confesses that he did not possess sufficient knowledge to appreciate them. As was to be expected from his point of view in art and life, their subjects for the most part repelled him; not one in ten should have been painted, is his remark, and even when the artist had chosen a good subject, he had not seen it from the right point of view. One picture he saw in Bologna made a profound impression on him as a representation of ideal womanhood—a St. Agatha, which he erroneously assigned to Raphael. He would mentally read his *Iphigenie* before her, he wrote, and would allow his heroine to utter no sentiment that would misbecome the saint.

As he drew nearer Rome, his impatience to reach his goal became irresistible. In Florence he spent only three hours, though he acknowledges that it opened "a perfectly new and unknown world" to him, and a day sufficed him for Perugia with its treasures of the Umbrian School. Yet he found time to give a day to Assisi, but not to see the "mystic marvels" of St. Francis. With his horror of asceticism and his accentuated distaste for Gothic art, he simply shut his eyes to the churches and cathedral which excite the enthusiasm of the modern visitor.

<sup>1</sup> Subsequently Goethe wrote that he found Venice "the most humanly interesting object" in his journey to Rome.



What he went to see in the very precincts of the saint was a pagan temple, the temple of Minerva, the first complete specimen of classical architecture he had encountered. It is with the enthusiasm of a neophyte that he descants on the happy choice of its situation, its impressiveness attained by such simple means, its unity of design.

On October 29, after a journey of eight weeks. Goethe entered Rome by the Porta del Popolo. He could hardly realize that the dream of his life had at length been fulfilled, and its fulfilment was marred only by the regret that his opportunity had not come to him fifteen years earlier. As it was, he abandoned himself to the spell of the Eternal City with an enthusiasm which could not have been more intense at any previous period of his life. He was again the Goethe of the days before Weimar had stiffened and repressed him. His entrance to Rome, he said, was a second birth-day, and life in Rome was a second youth.

His place of residence and his intended mode of life he had settled before his arrival. During both his first and his second sojourn in Rome he occupied rooms in the Corso, about a hundred yards from the Porta del Popolo.<sup>1</sup> The rooms were kept by a coachman and his wife, who had as other lodgers a number of German artists with whom he lived on equal terms and in cordial familiarity. It was one of these artists who was to be his principal guide and mentor in all things artistic, and whose general services he came to regard as invaluable in all that concerned Rome and Italy at large. This was Johann Tischbein, a painter of note in his day, who had been long resident in Rome and with whom Goethe had previously been in correspondence. It was not only Tischbein's eminence as a painter and his knowledge of art that attracted Goethe and excited his esteem ;

<sup>1</sup> Now No. 18. A marble tablet on its front bears the following inscription : In questa casa immaginò e scrisse cose immortale Volfango Goethe. Il Commune di Roma a memoria del grande ospite pose, 1872.



GOETHE IN THE ROMAN CAMPAGNA. BY TISCHBEIN (1787).

[Facing p. 328.]





it was also his large and genial nature, his wide intellectual interests, and his ingenuity of mind. In Tischbein he had a sympathetic and suggestive listener on the manifold subjects that interested himself.<sup>1</sup> Others to whom Goethe acknowledges his deep obligations for kindness and counsel were Karl Philipp Moritz,<sup>2</sup> an archæologist, who by his special study of prosody gave him valuable assistance in transmuting his prose *Iphigenie* into verse, and Johann Heinrich Meyer, learned in the history of art, who eventually became a member of his household in Weimar and his oracle in all matters connected with classical antiquity. With these men and others of kindred tastes the *quondam* Minister of State lived the bohemian life of artists in Rome. He adopted their ways and joined in their pranks, though he demurred when they seriously proposed to crown him with the poet's laurel on the Capitol. To his unfailing good humour and spirit of *camaraderie* they all bore hearty witness. When Moritz was laid aside as the result of an accident, Goethe was his diligent nurse and arranged that he should never be without one of their number at his bedside. To this inner circle of his acquaintances in which he threw off all restraint, has to be added another intimate, whom he came to know at a later date of his sojourn in Rome. This was Angelica Kauffmann, now at the height of her European reputation as an artist and settled in Rome with her second husband. Female society was at all periods of his life a necessity for Goethe, and in Angelica he found at once a charming woman and an artist whose refinement and grace of touch he genuinely admired. In her society he met with a responsive sympathy which he warmly acknowledges, more

Tischbein was specially interested in the resemblances to different animals in the faces of persons whom he painted, and had arrived at the Darwinian conclusion regarding the descent of man. Tischbein's portrait of Goethe seated amid ruins in the Campagna is well known.

<sup>2</sup> Moritz is known by his account of his travels in England (1786-8).

especially with reference to his *Iphigenie* in its altered form, the classical restraint of which appealed neither to his artist acquaintances in Rome nor to his friends in Weimar.<sup>1</sup>

A recently discovered letter of a young German artist then in Rome gives a lively impression of Goethe in these days when his natural man found unchecked play. In a succession of scenes, in the course of a day, he is presented as he appeared to the writer, who had evidently a due sense of being in the presence of a great man. An antique statue had been unearthed near the Church of Santa Maria on the right bank of the Tiber, and on a certain morning there was a gathering of artists to examine it. Goethe came with Tischbein, and our young artist with Angelica Kauffmann. It was the first time he had seen Goethe, and he narrowly observed him. While all the others babbled about the probable date and subject of the statue, Goethe, though he was known to have "four eyes and four ears," remained silent. The first impression made by Goethe on the youth was thus one of coldness and reserve, but this impression was to be changed in the course of the day. Leaving the statue, the company adjourned for their midday meal to a modest *trattoria* in the neighbourhood. In the course of the meal our narrator spilt some wine on the tablecloth, whereupon Goethe playfully pinched his ear "like some great child." The conversation turning on Michael Angelo, Goethe joined in with the volubility of ordinary mortals, after two bottles of wine. At the sight of the works of such an artist, he said among other things, one could only bury pen and pencil. "What, then, about your *Iphigenie*?" broke in Tischbein. Goethe cut a grimace, and left the company "like a naughty boy." Subsequently he was found behind the house at play with a child to whom he had given the name of Mignon.

<sup>1</sup> Angelica painted a portrait of Goethe which is not regarded as very successful.

Driving home with our artist and Angelica, he talked with such loudness and freedom with the *vetturino* that the lady twitched his sleeve to remind him of his indiscretion. On the way they passed St. Peter's, and at sight of its mighty dome Goethe exclaimed that he always had a kind of dread of Michael Angelo, as he seemed to him to exercise an enchanter's spell even over modern Rome. The pleasures of the day were not over. Before parting, the entire company, Angelica among them, adjourned to an *osteria*, and spent the night over their wine, Goethe drinking more than any one else. The writer of the letter we are quoting was equally struck by Goethe's delicate attentions to Angelica, and by the abandonment with which one, who had for ten years been a Minister of State, gave himself up to the company in which he found himself. In all his high spirits, however, he "unlike other German travellers who can be heard three streets off," spoke in tones so low that his words could be caught only by close attention. The company broke up as the bells of the churches tolled three in the morning, Goethe's parting remark being that he must now go home to his Juno.<sup>1</sup>

The day above described must have been an exceptional one with Goethe, for it is his own statement that during his first residence in Rome (November, 1786–February, 1787) he did not lose a single moment.<sup>2</sup> Spending the morning in drawing or working at the poetical pieces that were engaging him, he gave the rest of the day to sightseeing, chiefly under the guidance of Tischbein. To abstain from judging and simply to receive impressions from what he saw—such, he tells us, was the mental attitude he deliberately maintained in his first rapid survey.

Pagan though he was in all his sympathies at

<sup>1</sup> The Juno Ludovisi referred to below.

<sup>2</sup> He spent a few days in November at the country-house of Hofrat Reiffenstein, art-agent to the Court of Gotha and Petrograd.



this period, he did not shut his eyes to Christian Rome. One of his reasons, indeed, for the haste of his journey thither was to witness the Festival of All Saints, his impression of which was what we might expect. He was present at the celebration by the Pope in his private chapel in the Quirinal. What it bore in upon him was the astounding contrast between primitive Christianity and the religion, as he saw it before him, which called itself by that name. The saying "*venio iterum crucifigi*" crossed his mind, and he impatiently left the chapel for the vaulted and frescoed halls of the palace, where he could breathe more freely. Nevertheless, he continued to visit the churches on the occasions of the great festivals. On Christmas Day he made the round of the more important among them, finishing with St. Peter's, where he saw the Pope celebrate high mass. Here is his reflection on the spectacle. "There also I once more felt that I am too old for anything but truth. Their ceremonies and their operas, their processions and ballets, all run off me like water from an oilskin cloak. On the other hand, a manifestation of nature, such as a sunset seen from the Villa Madama, a work of art, such as my much-honoured Juno, make a deep and elevating impression." His repugnance to the form of Christianity he saw in Rome, however, did not blind him to the beauties of the great Christian artists; to the works of Michael Angelo and Raphael he gave the closest attention. Of the latter he said that, like nature, he was always in the right, and there most completely in the right where we least comprehend him. But of the two it was Michael Angelo who at this period most profoundly impressed him,<sup>1</sup> though he deliberately abstained from making comparisons between them. What he found in both was an element that embraced Christianity and paganism alike.

But it was the work of no modern artist that

<sup>1</sup> During his second sojourn in Rome it would seem that Raphael came to hold the first place in his esteem.

had brought Goethe to Rome. It was the remains of classical antiquity—its architecture, its sculpture, and its other vestiges—that he had come to see, and to which he gave his most concentrated attention. The Rome he saw was a different place from the Rome of to-day. Its modernization had not begun, and the Forum, the Palatine, and other monuments were yet uncovered. It was hard, he himself testifies, to get at ancient Rome. What was to be seen, however, did not disappoint him, and deepened the admiration he had conceived of the ancient mind. As at Venice he had found a guide and inspirer in Palladio, so in Rome he drew inspiration from another master—Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Thirty-one years before, Winckelmann had come to Rome at the same age as Goethe entered it—too late, in the opinion of both, to draw the fullest gain from what it had to offer them. Three men, according to Goethe—Shakespeare, Spinoza, and Linnæus—pre-eminently influenced his character and modes of thought, yet, it would seem that Winckelmann's influence on him was hardly less than that of any of these three. The sketch of Winckelmann's aims and opinions which he wrote at a subsequent period—one of the most remarkable productions we have from his hand—is at the same time a transcript of his own. It was now with Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* as his guide that he viewed what remains of that art were to be seen in Rome. Two objects among all he saw seemed to him most adequately to embody the mind and art of the ancients—a head of Jupiter, and the Juno Ludovisi. A cast of the former he placed opposite to his bed so that “he might pay to it his morning devotions”; the latter, his “first love in Rome,” he compared to a poem of Homer.

With his study of ancient art proceeded with equal ardour his study of nature. Since he had entered Italy, the richer development of its vegetation had quickened his interest in his botanical

researches, and we have seen how the fan-palm in the garden at Parma had thrown fresh light on the problem that was engaging him—the metamorphosis of plants. In Rome he continued his observations, and in February, 1787, he wrote to a correspondent that he was on the eve of the discovery of “new and beautiful relations” in the vegetable-kingdom.

What was the total impression made on him by the experience of Rome which he had so passionately desired? He sums it up for himself in one word; Rome had given him what he had never experienced before—a sense of *solidity*. “But, what is the greatest thing of all,” he wrote, “and what I feel here for the first time, is this: whoever looks about him here in earnest and has eyes to see cannot but become *solid*; he cannot but form a conception of solidity which never before was so vivid in him”; and in another place he speaks to the same effect. “But what I can say and what gives me the deepest joy is the effect upon the soul which I already feel: it is an inner solidity with which the spirit is, as it were, stamped—serious and yet not dull, a sober but cheerful habit of mind.” To what Rome had done for him he constantly returns. It had brought a tranquillity of mind unknown to him in the past, and it had given him a new foundation for all his future thinking. And the profit had not only been for his mind, but likewise for his heart; he would leave Rome a new man with many of his worst faults cured and with a zest in living that made a new world for him.

In the full tide of his life in Rome the schooling he had received there was put to a trying test. As we have seen, when he started on his journey from Carlsbad, he had concealed his destination from Frau von Stein, and it does not appear to have occurred to him that she, who for eleven years had been the confidant of his inmost thoughts and dreams, would take his secret flight amiss. That he meant no formal breach with her seems proved by the fact that from the day he began his journey



he kept a diary which was expressly intended for her eye and in which occur attestations of his devotion such as he had been in the habit of addressing to her. By some accident the first part of the diary did not come into her hands till Christmas and the second part not till the beginning of the year. Only when he reached Rome did he directly inform her where he was, and, as it happened, she first learned the fact from his communications to others in Weimar. A cold and brief note from her, received on December 9, awakened him to the real state of her feelings. It was the beginning of a breach that was never to be healed. After the interchange of a few letters her tone became more cordial, and during the remainder of his stay in Italy he wrote to her constantly and in terms expressive of all his former passion. But she had been wounded in the deepest feelings of a woman's heart, and no reiterated assurances on his part could restore their old relations. It is one among the many results of his Italian journey that it eventually freed him from a bond which, in the interests of both parties, was timeously snapped.

Goethe's original intention had been to return home at Easter, 1787, but a letter from the Duke, bidding him remain in Italy as long as he saw fit, changed his plans. After some hesitation he decided to proceed to Naples, and thither, accompanied by Tischbein, he set out on February 22 after a four months' residence in Rome. In Naples he remained over five weeks, and received impressions as new and in their way as powerful and abiding as those he received from Rome. Not art but nature laid its spell upon him at Naples. The words in which he describes the sensations evoked in him by the town and its surroundings show him in a kind of mental intoxication. "People may talk, describe, paint as they will—to be here is more than all." "Naples is a paradise; every one lives in a kind of drunken self-oblivion. That is just how I

feel. I hardly recognize myself; I seem to myself an entirely different being. Yesterday I thought: 'either you were mad before or you are mad now.'” In the people he found a source of inexhaustible interest, and their sluggishness, of which so much has been said, appeared to him only a natural manner of life imposed on them by their physical environment and in no wise deserving of reprobation.<sup>1</sup> And he himself, too, became inoculated with the spirit of the place; here, he wrote, “one can do nothing but live.” He laid aside his *incognito*, and freely entered such society as was offered to him. One entertainment that specially impressed him was the spectacle of Lady Hamilton—Nelson’s Lady Hamilton—posing in Greek costume and presenting a picture of ravishing and various charm such as no artist could put on canvas. He visited Capua and Pompeii, of which he makes the curious remark that “many calamities have happened to mankind but few have given so much pleasure to posterity.” The object, however, which most keenly interested him while in Naples was Vesuvius, which he ascended thrice—on the last visit running the risk of the fate of the elder Pliny.

On March 29 he sailed from Naples for Palermo. With him he took as a travelling companion,<sup>2</sup> J. C. Kniep, a skilful draughtsman, to whom he had been introduced by Tischbein, and who undertook to make sketches of scenes and objects of which Goethe wished to have memorials. It was the first time that Goethe had been on the open sea, and the experience suggested the reflection that no one can have a conception of the world and his relation to it who has not undergone that experience. The voyage was a rough one and lasted four days, during which, a prisoner in his cabin, he mitigated his misery by working at his *Tasso*. In Palermo he spent sixteen days which he counted among the happiest of his

<sup>1</sup> In the *Italienische Reise* he records at length his impressions of Naples and its inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to a correspondent in Weimar, Goethe says that he would never again travel alone.

life.<sup>1</sup> As at Naples, it was nature that chiefly interested him. The public gardens by their luxuriant beauty recalled the island of the Phæacians, and he bought a copy of Homer and brooded over a drama in which Nausicaa should be the central figure, and which was to be another of his unfulfilled literary projects. The gardens suggested other thoughts, which curiously illustrate the blending in him of the poet and the man of science. The sight of many plants, which he had hitherto seen only under artificial cultivation, freely developing under the open heaven, awoke his fancy of an archetypal plant which would explain the mystery of vegetation. At the thought, he tells, the gardens of Alcinous vanished from his mind; a real garden took their place, and the problem that haunted him dispelled his poetical dreams.<sup>2</sup> On April 22, by way of Segesta and Sciacca, he reached Girgenti, where he spent four days in examining the architectural remains and the natural curiosities of the neighbourhood. It had been his intention to visit Syracuse, but, on being informed that by crossing the island to Catania he would pass through a rich corn-growing country, he changed his mind and chose this route. What he saw of the rich fertility of the region through which they passed explained once for all, he says, how Sicily came to be the "granary" of Italy. From Catania, where he was dissuaded from attempting the ascent of Etna, he proceeded to Taormina, whose natural beauties reawoke his memories of the *Odyssey*, and under whose inspiration he sketched the plan of his projected drama on the theme of Nausicaa. On May 10 he was at Messina—the term of his travels,

<sup>1</sup> While in Palermo Goethe visited the relatives of Cagliostro, and made minute inquiries into his antecedents. His interest in Cagliostro subsequently induced him to write his play, *Der Grosscophta*. See below, p. 427.

<sup>2</sup> It was characteristic of Goethe that he chid his guide at Palermo for recalling the fact that Hannibal had fought a battle in the neighbourhood. Such a reminiscence, he said, was an outrage on the imagination at that moment.



which had extended over six weeks. By his own testimony he had been amply rewarded by his journeyings. "Italy without Sicily makes no picture in the soul," was his comment from Palermo; "the key to everything is here."

On May 17 the two travellers sailed from Messina to Naples, and on the way thither had an adventure which, like the incident at Malcesine, shows that Goethe was capable of a promptness and decision that might have made him an effective leader of men. The voyage was unpropitious from the beginning. First the vessel was beaten from its course by a contrary wind, and, as on the previous voyage, Goethe fell helplessly seasick. Later there came a dead calm, and, as night fell, it was feared that the ship was drifting on the rocks of Capri. The passengers were a miscellaneous crowd of men, women, and children, and at the threatened danger they were seized with a panic, aggravated by the clamour of some on board that the captain and his officers did not know their business. Goethe and Kniep were at first so engrossed in observing the smoke and flames of Vesuvius that they were unaware of what was going on. Realizing the situation, they saw that, if the panic continued, the danger was serious, and Goethe, as composedly, he says, as in his adventure at Malcesine, addressed the crowd. By the din they were making, he told them, they were rendering the efforts of the sailors all the more difficult; and their duty now was to betake them to their prayers and to remember how Christ stilled the storm on the Lake of Tiberias. His words had the desired effect and, a light breeze arising, the ship reached Naples in safety after a voyage of four days.

Goethe's second visit to Naples, which extended over a fortnight, was spent in revisiting places he had seen, and in deepening his impression of the inhabitants, in whose manner of life he found a constant interest. Deserving of notice is his curiosity

regarding St. Philip Neri, a native of Naples, and perhaps the only saint who ever attracted him. What he saw in St. Philip, in combination with the qualities of a saint of the Church, was a naturalness, a spontaneity, a communicative exhilaration, which it was good for all men to contemplate. Long afterwards (1810), from notes he now made, he wrote a sketch of the saint's life with a sympathetic appreciation which would have pleased one to whom Goethe himself would have been the embodiment of all that is pernicious to the welfare of men!<sup>1</sup>

It was with keen regret that he left Naples, where he had lived a life of pure physical enjoyment he had not known since his early youth. Another reason for his regret at leaving it was, as he tells us, that he missed seeing the result of an unusually violent eruption of Vesuvius which he had been assiduously observing before his departure. It was a spectacle of another kind that induced him to shorten his stay at Naples, and to proceed to Rome—the Festival of Corpus Christi, when it was the custom to display the tapestries of Raphael, one of the jealously guarded treasures of the Vatican. The festival itself he found imposing, though marred by some faults of taste, which the sight of Raphael's art obliterated by transporting him into a sublimer atmosphere.

It was on June 6, 1787, that Goethe settled down to his second sojourn in Rome, which was to last for over ten months. His quarters were his former rooms in the Corso. His enjoyment of Rome during his second visit was as intense as during the first. "I find myself, body and soul, better than ever before." "I have grown steadily happier during my stay in Rome." So he wrote to his friends in Weimar. But the satisfaction he now derived from Rome was of a deeper and more permanent nature than on the occasion of his former residence. During his first

<sup>1</sup> St. Philip Neri was Cardinal Newman's patron saint.

stay, we have seen, his set purpose was to receive impressions with an open mind, without attempting to co-ordinate them or to estimate their value. It was with an equally deliberate purpose that he now assumed another mental attitude to all that he saw. What that attitude was he has himself expressed in some remarkable words. "Nor will I rest now until nothing is mere word and tradition to me any more,<sup>1</sup> but everything a living conception. From youth up this was my inclination and my affliction; now that age approaches, I am determined at least to attain the attainable and achieve the achievable, since I have so long deservedly and undeservedly endured the fate of Tantalus and of Sisyphus." To the same purport are his well-known words written during the same period. "The fashion of this world passeth away; and I would fain occupy myself only with the abiding. . . ."

These ten months, therefore, were a period of assiduous toil, and it was only towards its close that he appeared in general society as the representative of the Duke. He rose early, and after a short walk settled down to his plan of work. Sightseeing, occupation with the unfinished literary pieces he had brought with him to Italy, drawing, and botanical observations in turn filled his day. He felt himself under an obligation to the Duke to complete the literary tasks he had in hand, and he had diligently prosecuted them in the course of his travels. His *Iphigenie* he had finished in its final form during his first residence in Rome; during the second he finished *Egmont*, recast *Erwin und Elmire* and *Claudine von Villa Bella*, and in the Borghese Gardens wrote the witch-kitchen scene in *Faust*.

But his main occupation was the practice of drawing in its various branches. From his youth

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to find Keats expressing himself in similar terms. "The more we know," he wrote, "the more inadequacy we find in the world to satisfy us—this is an old observation; but I have made up my mind never to take anything for granted."—*Letters of John Keats*, ed. Sidney Colvin (1891), pp. 200, 201.



he had been in the habit of sketching whenever the opportunity and the impulse came, and had, indeed, been divided in mind as to whether nature meant him for a poet or for an artist. Now, however, he put himself through a course of training with the serious purpose of mastering the art. Besides Tischbein he had now another guide, who has also a place in his biography. This was Philipp Hackert, a landscape-painter, to whom Tischbein had introduced him in Naples and who was now in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Under the direction of these two and of the learned archæologist, Meyer, he practised first on architecture, then on landscape, and finally on the human figure. It was to this last study that he gave his most concentrated attention, as "the Alpha and Omega of all known things." In January, 1788, he wrote: "I am now deep in the study of the human figure, which is the *ne plus ultra* of all human knowledge and achievement."

What profit accrued to him from this passionate study of the various forms of artistic expression? First, he tells us, he attained a conception of the essential conditions of all high art which he henceforth held as a permanent possession. What this conception was, he has expressed in these words: "These works in the great style of art have been produced as consummate works of nature by men who followed true and natural laws. All that is arbitrary, all that is fanciful has dropped away; we are face to face with the inevitable, with God." But he attained another result that marked a turning-point in the direction of his own productivity: the conviction was at last brought home to him that not art but poetry was the medium through which his genius was to find its true expression. And another reflection satisfied him that all the toil he had spent in the endeavour to make himself an artist had not been in vain; no one, it seemed to him, is capable of judging rightly what he cannot himself produce. If he could not

<sup>1</sup> Goethe subsequently wrote a biography of Hackert.

himself be a great artist, he had at least qualified himself to recognize the essentials of great art.

During his last months in Rome his interest was engaged in still another art. At the end of October, by his invitation his old Frankfort friend, Kayser, the musician, of whom we have already heard, came to Rome. His special reason for having Kayser with him was to obtain music for his *Egmont* and other dramatic pieces, but, with Kayser under the same roof with him, he characteristically seized the opportunity of studying the art in its own nature and development. With Kayser as his interpreter he diligently attended musical performances in the theatres and churches, and gained impressions of a world of emotions hitherto unknown to him. To the end he retained his interest in music, and in extreme old age took delight in the playing of the boy Felix Mendelssohn, but he admitted to his musical friend Zelter that in the sphere of music he must remain an exoteric.

Since he had entered Italy, its people had engaged his interest not less than its art treasures and its material productions. To the carnival at Rome, therefore, as a manifestation of the soul of the Italian people, he devoted special attention, and from the notes he now made he embodied a description in the narrative of his travels, equally remarkable for minuteness of detail and for psychological insight. What is noteworthy is that from his first contact with the people he felt that there was a gulf between him and them. On his first arrival in Rome he wrote: "How morally wholesome it is for me to live among a wholly sensuous people. . . . I excuse any one who blames and reproaches them; they stand too far apart from us, and to hold intercourse with them as a stranger is troublesome and expensive." By the time of his second residence in Rome, this impression had deepened. "I am becoming more and more at home," he then wrote, "with the arts and with nature, and less and less at home with the nation; I am, in

any case, already an isolated being, and with this people I have absolutely nothing in common."

In whatever place Goethe had hitherto sojourned—in Leipzig, in Strassburg, in Wetzlar—a woman had been in the foreground of his experience. In consistency with his resolve to lose no moment of his time in Rome, however, he had abstained in exemplary fashion from all philandering as an untimely distraction. In January, 1787, he could assure Frau von Stein that she had only one rival in Rome—the Juno Ludovisi, and in September of the same year he told the Duke that, with the exception of Angelica Kauffmann, women played no part in his life. He was not to leave Rome, however, without a love passage which, from his own account of it, might have resulted in a serious entanglement. At the close of October he received an invitation from a Mr. Jenkins, a rich English art-dealer, to spend a few weeks with him at his house in Castel Gandolfo. The company was numerous and gay, and among them were two beauties, a brunette and a blonde, the latter from Milan, and known as *die schöne Mailänderin*.<sup>1</sup> The blonde proved the more potent charmer; instantaneously and irresistibly he felt drawn to her, "as usually happens," he says, "to a heart disengaged." The attraction was mutual, and on Goethe's part, at least, the relation threatened to have consequences. He received a rude awakening; the young lady, he learned, was on the eve of marriage, and during the remainder of his stay at Castel Gandolfo he had need of all his self-control. The sequel, as he tells it, shows the risk he had run. The swain proved false; the lady fell seriously ill in consequence, and Goethe was assiduous in his inquiries after her health—an attention which she tenderly appreciated. Immediately before his departure from Rome, he called on her to pay his

<sup>1</sup> Her name was Maddalena Riggi. It was to her he addressed the lines beginning—

Cupido, loser, eigensinniger Knabe.



final respects, and the interview, interrupted by the entrance of the lady's brother, ended in "friendly, sober prose." On leaving her, however, he found that his coachman had disappeared, and their conversation was resumed, he below and she at the window. The circumstances were hardly favourable to lovers' confessions; nevertheless they then exchanged words—hers, Goethe says, being too sacred to have a place in his narrative, though engraved ineffaceably in his memory.

About the time when he met the fair Milanese, Goethe received news from Weimar which caused him some disquiet. The Duchess Amalia, inspired like others at Weimar by his own glowing descriptions of his happiness in Rome, announced her intention of joining him there, and he was consulted as to the arrangements that should be made for her stay. The possibility of her presence in Rome may well have filled him with dismay, as it would have involved a disharmony in his existing relations that would have marred the remainder of his sojourn. As delicately as possible he suggested to the Duke that winter was not the fitting time to see Rome to full advantage. His advice was followed, and the visit of the Duchess was postponed till after he had left it.

Relieved from the infliction of the Duchess, Goethe was able to live his life of untrammelled pleasure and toil to the close of his stay in Rome. But, as its term approached, his distress became such as completely to unnerve him. During the fourteen days preceding his departure, he afterwards told the wife of Herder, he had wept like a child. In the words, written long afterwards, in which he describes these last days in Rome, there is something of the solemnity of one recalling a great crisis in his fate. On the last three nights, he tells us, the moon shone down on the Eternal City with such splendour and with such effect as to transport him into "a simpler and a greater world." First with his friends and

afterwards alone, he paid farewell visits to the great objects that had filled his mind with new conceptions of the possibilities of man, and with painful insistence the lines in which Ovid lamented his banishment from Rome kept recurring to his memory.<sup>1</sup>

Accompanied by Kayser, whom he meant to take with him to Weimar, Goethe left Rome on April 23, 1788—never again, he told the Chancellor von Müller twenty-five years later, to know a day's happiness. On his journey homewards he spent three weeks in Florence, where the Venus de Medici was the chief object of his admiration. The cathedral at Milan he derided as a Gothic gewgaw, but his impression of Leonardo's *Last Supper* remained one of the most abiding and most precious of the possessions he bore with him from Italy. He had meant to visit his mother at Frankfort on his homeward journey, but, eager to reach Weimar after his long absence, he abandoned his intention, and by way of Constance arrived there on June 11, so bronzed and thin that his friends at first did not recognize him.

In Goethe's own estimation his residence in Italy had entirely fulfilled the two main objects which had prompted it. It had restored his bodily health and effectually cured the "moral malady" from which he had suffered during the years immediately preceding his journey. Its second object had also been fulfilled to his permanent satisfaction; his thirst for "true art" had been thoroughly quenched. But had his travels brought all gain and no loss? According to certain of his own countrymen, his loss had been greater than his gain. It was the disastrous result of his Italian experience, they say, that it definitively

<sup>1</sup> Ovid's lines are as follow:—

Cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago,  
Quæ mihi supremum tempus in Urbe fuit;  
Cum repeto noctem, qua tot mihi cara reliqui,  
Labitur ex oculis nunc quoque gutta meis.  
Jamque quiescebant voces hominumque canumque,  
Lunaque nocturnos alta regebat equos.  
Hanc ego suspiciens, et ab hac Capitolia cernens,  
Quæ nostro frustra juncta fuere Lari.

arrested the natural development of his genius and led him to mispend his powers in attempts to realize ideals in art and literature which are impossible under modern conditions. Nature had intended him to be the great interpreter of his own time and his own people, but, perverted by false ideals, he gave to the world a succession of works whose pseudo-classicism appealed neither to the national mind nor to the national heart. What, at least, is true is that on his return from Italy he found himself more out of sympathy with his surroundings in Weimar than in the years immediately preceding his journey. And when, in the years succeeding his return, he gave to the world the works inspired by Italy, he was to find them received with cold disapproval even by those of whose sympathy he felt the need. One great result of the Italian journey the world at large has recognized. If it was unfortunate for his genius as a poet, it was of supreme value to him in another of his many functions—the one by which he has put the world under the greatest debt—that of an observer and counsellor in the art of living. What he saw and felt in Italy opened up to him a new world of thought and feeling ; it enabled him to estimate the comparative value of ancient and modern ideals, and thus to survey human effort as a whole and in its highest manifestations.



## CHAPTER XXI

### EGMONT, IPHIGENIE, AND TASSO

GOETHE, as we have seen, had taken with him to Italy the manuscripts of four uncompleted works—*Egmont*, *Iphigenie*, *Tasso*, and *Faust*. Of the four the first two only were finished during the Italian journey; *Tasso* was not perfected till a year after his return to Weimar, and of *Faust* he wrote only two scenes.<sup>1</sup> *Egmont* was the first to be given to the world, appearing at Easter of 1788 in one of the volumes of the edition of his works published by Göschen. Like his two previous dramas, *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Clavigo*, *Egmont* is an essential part of Goethe's biography, and, apart from the play itself, he has in different places made such full comments on its origin, intention, and composition as to give valuable assistance in its interpretation as a biographical document.

Having pictured an era and personified a type in *Götz von Berlichingen*, he tells us in his Autobiography, he looked about him for a similar critical period in the world's history. He found it in the great revolt of the Netherlands against the domination of Spain, and in Count Egmont he saw a contemporary personage sufficiently interesting and important to serve as a type. As he conceived the character of Egmont, however, he realized that he must take certain liberties with the actual facts of his life and career. The Egmont of history was of mature age, a husband, and the father of eleven children, but it was necessary in Goethe's presentment of him that he should be a youth with the greater possibilities

<sup>1</sup> The one was the scene in the *Hexenküche*; the other was that in the *Wald und Höhle*, which opens with the famous soliloquy "Erhabener Geist, du gabst mir, gabst mir alles."

of life before him. The Egmont whom Goethe meant to create was, in truth, to embody a personal experience and certain conclusions regarding human destiny which that experience had suggested. Though the subject had attracted him at an earlier date, it was in the autumn of 1775, during the days immediately preceding his departure to Weimar—the days when he fully realized “the frightful gulf” which now separated him from Lili Schönemann, that the constraining necessity of finding relief for his distracted feelings directly incited him to the act of creation. Reflecting on his own past, he seemed to see that his destiny had been influenced by an incalculable element against which he had been powerless to contend. He found himself unable to define precisely the nature of this element, but he gave it the name of the *dæmonic*. It was an agency observable in the whole world of nature, obviously present in the life of animals, but manifesting itself most conspicuously in man. As it displays itself in its manifold workings, it is not essentially a force for evil, but it intervenes in the moral order in such wise that its tendency seems to be to thwart it. In certain individuals it is present in such force that the world is appalled by it. It is not by reason of any special gifts that they exercise their influence, but by virtue of an energy residing in them which moulds men and things to their will, and which can be vanquished only by the universe itself. In Egmont, as Goethe conceived him, this element of the *dæmonic* was to be exhibited in its fullest working. He was to be depicted as a youth untrammelled by ties, with a passionate desire to live life to the full, and with a personal magnetism that made him a popular idol and gained him the ascendancy over all with whom he came into immediate contact. We see in what measure Egmont was to be Goethe himself, of whom Wieland said that “he was a veritable ruler of spirits.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The element of the *dæmonic* in nature exercised Goethe to the close of his life. He had more than one conversation with Eckermann on the subject.

It was in the fever of the conflicting emotions resulting from his breach with Lili that he addressed himself to the work of embodying these conceptions. In writing *Götz* he had been stimulated by the sympathy of his sister Cornelia; in the case of *Egmont* his confidant and inspirer was his father, who showed the liveliest interest in its progress, and, well aware of his son's fitful method of working, urged him "day and night" to its completion. *Egmont*, however, was composed in a different fashion from *Götz*. The first sketch of *Götz* he had written in six weeks, act and scene in orderly sequence. On the other hand, after finishing the introductory part of *Egmont* he concentrated himself on its principal scenes without giving a thought to their connecting links. How much of the play was composed at this time has not been ascertained, and, like most of Goethe's greater works, it was intermittently to occupy him for many years and under varying conditions. The original inspiration under which he threw himself into his work could not be maintained in Weimar. In his new world he was preoccupied with other cares and distractions, his ideals in life and literature underwent a gradual change, and, moreover, Frau von Stein, his inspirer and monitress in the case of other literary tasks, had no part in *Egmont*, with whose characters and general scope she was not in sympathy. Working at it intermittently, however, he wrote some new scenes, recast original ones, and in 1782 completed it in its first form. Dissatisfied with this form, he took it with him to Italy, and it is in his comments on his labours in recasting it that we have the most interesting glimpse into the nature of the play as we have it.

It was not till his second residence in Rome that he addressed himself to the task. Begun early in July, 1787, he finished it in the first week of the following September.<sup>1</sup> From the conditions under which the work was carried out it had necessarily the character of a *tour de force*. The difficulty, as

<sup>1</sup> He says that whole scenes did not require to be recast.



he told one of his correspondents, was to identify himself with a work conceived twelve years before, when his conceptions of literary form were so widely different from what they had become. Only, he says, in the perfect freedom he was now enjoying, could he have accomplished the task. In the process he became conscious of two radical faults of his nature from which he had suffered all his life. The one fault was that he had never been able to learn the necessity of craftsmanship (*Handwerk*) in the treatment of a subject; and the other was kindred to it—an incapacity for the patient toil requisite to perfect a work begun. Nevertheless, so conscientiously had he applied himself to the improvement of the original draft of the play that, in sending it to Herder, he expressed some confidence regarding its favourable reception. As to how it would be received by the Weimar circle, indeed, he showed an anxiety that suggested his own misgivings.<sup>1</sup> The first tidings he heard regarding the impression it had made were encouraging, but he was to learn eventually that it was to make no such appeal to the world as *Götz* and *Werther*.

Like *Götz*, *Egmont* is modelled on the historical plays of Shakespeare, but it has the organic unity of an artistically constructed whole, even in less degree than *Götz*. The characters speak, but they do not act, and hence between the successive scenes we have no sense of causation as the result of personal, active agency. A brief sketch of the play will show what Goethe himself regarded as its inherent defect. Besides citizens and soldiers who figure in the street scenes, there are nine characters of more or less account, two of them being the chief centres of interest; they are Margaret of Parma, the regent of the Netherlands, and Machiavell, her secretary, who appear together in two separate scenes; William, Prince of Orange; the Duke of Alva and his son

<sup>1</sup> He says of the play as a whole that "it was as good as it could be rather than as good as it should be."

Ferdinand ; Egmont ; Clärchen, Egmont's mistress ; the mother of Clärchen ; and Clärchen's lover, Brackenburg, a burgher's son.<sup>1</sup> The First Act brings the situation before us. In the first scene, a crowd of citizens and soldiers, present at a shooting-match, discuss the state of the country, the general discontent with the Spanish rule, and the threatening revolt of the people ; but the main object of the scene is to exhibit Egmont as the central figure in the crisis, the popular darling, and the expected deliverer of his nation. The second scene has a similar intention. From the conversation between Margaret of Parma and Machiavell we learn what importance is attached to the personality and probable action of Egmont by those in authority. In the third scene Egmont's "dæmonic" power is further illustrated—a power that imposes on all hearts, but is remorseless in its working. The speakers are Clärchen, her lover Brackenburg, and her mother. Before she had seen Egmont, Clärchen had been prepared to cast in her lot with Brackenburg, but from the moment she had set eyes on Egmont her fate had been sealed, and thenceforward she lived only in the thought of him. In the first scene of the Second Act Egmont himself appears and gives proof of his ascendancy over the popular mind by dismissing a crowd of noisy citizens assembled in the public square of Brussels. The second and last scene of this Act is to be regarded as the most important in the drama, as in it Goethe most explicitly develops his conception of Egmont's character and of the dæmonic force which drives him to his doom. In a conversation with his secretary, Egmont lays bare at once the secret of his life and his consciousness of being in the grasp of an irresistible fate. He thus describes his own attitude to life : "That I am joyous, take things easily, live fast, is my good fortune, nor would I exchange it for the safety of a sepulchre. . . . Do I live only to think of life ? Am I to forgo the enjoyment of the present

<sup>1</sup> The scene throughout is in Brussels.

moment to secure the next? And must that in its turn be consumed in anxieties and melancholy humours?" And in the best-known passage of the play he gives expression to the dominant idea under the influence of which Goethe created him. "Child! Child!" he exclaims to his secretary, "forbear. As if goaded by invisible spirits, the sunsteeds of time rush onward with the frail chariot of our destiny; and nothing remains for us but, with calm self-possession, firmly to grasp the reins, and to guide the wheels now right, now left, here from the rock and there from the abyss. Whither he is hasting, what man knows?"<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the conversation between Egmont and his secretary, Orange enters, and his appearance is the turning-point of the drama and the decisive moment of Egmont's fate. In earnest colloquy Orange points out to Egmont the precipice on which they are both standing. Alva is coming, and from his character and past career they may judge what policy he will follow—a policy of merciless suppression which will involve their own destruction. On both, therefore, it is incumbent that for their own safety and in the interests of the people they should not fall into Alva's hands. Egmont refuses to flee, but he is perturbed to a degree which is new in his experience. "That other men's thoughts," he soliloquizes, when Orange leaves him, "should have such influence over us! To myself it would never have occurred; and this man transfers his anxiety to me. Begone! This drop is alien to my veins. Kind nature, cast it forth! And there is surely still a gentle way to bathe the wrinkles of care from my forehead."<sup>1</sup> To successive critics, be it said in passing, this prompting of Egmont to forget his cares in the arms of Clärchen has seemed a false stroke of art, as it strips him of the claim to be a true hero.

The opening scene of the Third Act portends the tragic close. From the conversation of the Regent Margaret and Machiavell, again in council, we learn

<sup>1</sup> Both of these passages are adapted from Miss Swanwick's translation.



that Alva is on the way and that a reign of terror awaits the country. In the next scene we have the only interview between Egmont and Clärchen, before whom he presents himself at night in her mother's house, in a magnificent dress and adorned with all his orders.<sup>1</sup> Its place in the development of the drama is that it shows Egmont in still another light as a "conquering lord"—the expression applied to Goethe himself by his friends. Dazzled by the halo that surrounded his personality and his name, Clärchen, a humble seamstress, places her all at his feet and finds her life realized in her self-abandonment. In the Fourth Act the doom of Egmont is sealed. Alva appears and summons Egmont, Orange, and other leaders to his presence. Orange disobeys the summons, but Egmont, blindly confident, presents himself and is peremptorily committed to prison—the only personal action followed by direct consequences in the whole play. The key in which the concluding Act is pitched forcibly reminds us of the difficulty which Goethe found in retouching the play at a period when he had long left behind him the mood in which it had been originally conceived. The shrill emotion that is the predominating note of this final Act is in strange contrast to the pervading restraint which characterizes *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*—composed under the inspiration of his new ideals of life and art. Clärchen, frantic at the impending doom of her idol Egmont, rushes into the public street, with impassioned words endeavours to incite the populace to his rescue, and, failing in her object, drinks poison—an action imitated by her disappointed lover Brackenburg. The concluding scene of the play, in which Egmont is represented in the hours preceding his execution, is in a similar strain. It is a touch in keeping with Goethe's device of exhibiting the dæmonic element in Egmont by the general enthusiasm

<sup>1</sup> This scene is imitated by Scott in the interview between Leicester and Amy Robsart in *Kenilworth*—a pardonable borrowing in Goethe's opinion.

he excites, that Ferdinand, the son of Alva, visits him in prison, and passionately expresses the admiration with which he had long followed his career. The last glimpse we have of Egmont leaves us in a mood of questioning that weakens the feeling of tragic effect. In his sleep he sees a vision of Liberty in the semblance of Clärchen and, awaking, delivers an impassioned apostrophe on the vision which neither his character nor his action, as represented in the drama, has prepared us to expect from him.<sup>1</sup>

From this sketch of the play it will be seen that Goethe's intention throughout is centred in one figure—the figure of Egmont; and so it may be said that, if the play lacks the momentum that results from the driving force of the characters and from the unity of a logically reticulated whole, it has a unity of its own—"a unity of interest," in Coleridge's phrase, that comes from the impetus of the original inspiration. Though there is little or no causal connection between the successive scenes, each at least serves to focus the attention on the central figure. Clärchen even, the only other person in the drama who shares our interest with Egmont as a vivid creation, exists mainly to throw his character into greater relief. As regards the remaining characters in the play, their appearances are too rare or too casual to leave any deep impression on the mind.<sup>2</sup>

Yet in spite of its generally recognized shortcomings in dramatic art, *Egmont* is felt to be a living poem, the product of an imagination working under a genuine experience. For, as has been said, Egmont, like Clavigo and Werther, is a partial portrait of Goethe himself. If Egmont surrenders himself to every impulse of the moment, so, according to his own words, did Goethe in the time

<sup>1</sup> The same criticism has been passed on Clärchen's sudden blossoming into a heroine—though, perhaps, with less justice.

<sup>2</sup> In adapting *Egmont* for the stage Schiller left out the scenes in which Margaret of Parma and Machiavell appear, as unnecessary to the action.

of his distraction caused by his relations to Lili Schöнемann. "But I abide true to myself," he then wrote, "and let things take their course." Nevertheless, we know that in the character of *Egmont* we have only one side of Goethe's nature and the temporary predominance of one mood and one aspect of life which for the time preoccupied him. It was from the possession of other qualities than appear in *Egmont*, and by the conviction that man is not so completely the child of circumstance as *Egmont* typifies, that he strove with such unflagging persistence to fashion his life in accordance with the successive ideals that were revealed to him.

Goethe appears to have anticipated as general and triumphant a success for *Egmont* as had awaited *Götz* and *Werther*; if so, he was speedily disillusioned. It was encouragingly received by Herder and his circle, but other persons in Weimar did not conceal their disappointment with this latest birth of his genius. The Duke's criticism, Goethe said, was more pleasing to him as a man than as a poet; and Frau von Stein bluntly called Clärchen *eine Dirne*. The general public were equally unsympathetic; as Goethe bitterly remarks, they had formed an opinion of what they were to expect from the author of *Götz* and *Werther*, and, as *Egmont* was not what they expected, they received it coldly. The note of adverse criticism, which has persisted in Germany ever since, was first struck by Schiller in a review which appeared in the autumn following its publication. Though generously praising it for its many beauties—its poetic glow, its masterly evocation of the spirit of the time, the vividness of the street scenes, the charm of Clärchen—he subjected the play as a whole to strictures that have been generally endorsed by succeeding German critics. By the unwarrantable liberties Goethe has taken with the historic *Egmont* he deprived him of the pathetic interest which his fate would have excited had he



been represented as a husband and a father.<sup>1</sup> It was not a happy idea to blend a love idyll with the crisis of a nation's fate. Egmont is too weak a character to make the impression of a hero, and the light-hearted confidence with which he puts aside Orange's warnings is inconsistent with high-minded action. But, in Schiller's judgment, the inherent defect of the play is its lack of dramatic action, and he characterizes the concluding scene as a *salto mortale* into the world of opera—a judgment in which most critics have agreed with him. Nevertheless, though Schiller has severely judged *Egmont* for its lack of dramatic quality, it was at his instance that it was first played in the Weimar theatre (1796),<sup>2</sup> though its comparative failure justified his original opinion. It was first acted in Berlin in 1801, and it has ever since maintained its place in the repertory of the greatest German theatres.<sup>3</sup>

It is a remarkable fact that *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Egmont* belong to the same period of Goethe's life. Both were originally conceived in Frankfort, were carried on in Weimar, and were finished in Italy. Both are essential parts of his biography, yet from their informing ideas, from their style and construction they might hardly seem to be the product of the same mind at the same stage of the writer's development. In *Egmont* Goethe is still under Shakespearian influence, its style is still in the strain of *Götz von Berlichingen*, and it ends in melodrama. In *Iphigenie* we are in another world. Shakespeare is forgotten and another influence inspires it, in whole and in part, and all is chastened, measured, and calm. Yet under his new guise we recognize the Goethe who reveals himself in *Werther*

<sup>1</sup> Yet at a later period of his life Schiller laid it down that "the poet was lord of history." Goethe held that for the poet "no character is historical."

<sup>2</sup> It was the presence of the great contemporary actor Iffland that suggested its performance.

<sup>3</sup> Beethoven, who greatly admired *Egmont*, composed his music for it in 1810.

and *Götz*. He works under a different inspiration, but the very completeness with which that inspiration masters him is but another illustration of his susceptibility to immediate impressions and of their overpowering hold on him. The contrast between *Egmont* and *Iphigenie* is such that it seems to imply a complete breach with his past, yet, as certain of his subsequent productions were to show, the bent of his youthful genius was to assert itself in him to the end.

We have seen the gradual development of Goethe's new conceptions of life and art, and how he found in ancient Greece the ideals which brought him satisfaction both as a man and as an artist. But these ideals implied new conceptions as regards alike the substance and the form requisite to the production of great drama. The theme he chose in the particular case of *Iphigenie* was one which involved the presentation of a definite philosophy of life and of human conduct. This philosophy was summed up for him in the phrase *reine Menschlichkeit*, pure humanity, which, as we have seen, Goethe had set before himself as the ideal after which he must strive if he were to live his full life. Goethe was not the first to conceive this ideal; it was the gospel that had been proclaimed by Rousseau, Herder, and Lessing, who, differing widely on many points, agreed in recognizing an inherent capacity in man to master his lower instincts and develop the best that is in him. It was an ideal that had no connection with supernatural sanctions; it was of spontaneous origin; it had been realized by the Greeks more than by any other people, and it was capable of being realized by mankind as a whole. In his seventy-sixth year he expressed thus concretely what *reine Menschlichkeit* meant for him. In different ages and among different peoples there have appeared individuals who, by the possession of certain virtues and certain personal qualities, have excited the love and admiration of their fellows; in the sum-total of these

virtues and qualities is found *reine Menschlichkeit*. As it was under the domination of the dæmonic element in nature that he wrote *Egmont*, so it was under this new inspiration that he wrote *Iphigenie*, which is at once a pæan of "pure humanity" and an illustration of its victorious power.<sup>1</sup>

As had been the case with his previous dramas—*Götz*, *Clavigo*, and *Egmont*—he fell back on his own experience for the materials out of which he could embody his new conceptions in dramatic form. Looking back on his past, he saw his life under another aspect from that which he had presented in *Egmont*. He saw himself not as the sport of any extraneous agency, but as the victim of his own ill-regulated passions. His successive relations to Friederike Brion, to Lotte Buff, and to Lili Schöнемann had resulted in a state of mental distraction ruinous to concentrated effort. He had compared himself to Cain, a doomed and aimless wanderer upon earth, but it was in another figure that he now found an apter similitude. In Euripides' play, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, he saw in the character of Orestes, pursued by the Furies for the slaying of his mother, a parable of his own fate which might be turned to artistic uses. In his first conception of the play he was to write, it was the figure of Orestes that primarily attracted him, but in Weimar his conception took a wider scope—the result, also, of a personal experience. Under the influence of Frau von Stein he had become another man; she alone had understood him and, understanding him, had guided him to self-mastery. Here was another personal experience to which, in accordance with his invariable impulse, he felt impelled to give poetical expression. In *Iphigenia*, the sister of Orestes, he would show forth what Frau von Stein had effected in himself; she should embody the ideal of pure

<sup>1</sup> In a copy of *Iphigenie* which he presented to the actor Krüger in 1827, he inscribed a short poem in which occur the famous lines—

Alle menschliche Gebrechen  
Sühnet reine Menschlichkeit.



humanity, and by the moral beauty of her nature rescue her brother from the curse attendant on his crime.

Before going to Weimar his thoughts had been turned to a drama suggested by that of Euripides, but it was not till 1776, the year following his arrival there, that the plan of it began to take shape in his mind. As in the case of *Egmont*, however, it was to be many years before it reached the final form in which we have it. So anxious and protracted, indeed, was the toil he spent on it that he called it his *Schmerzenskind*—his child of sorrows. He began its actual composition in February, 1779, and in the succeeding months, amid the distractions of a recruiting journey, worked at it so assiduously that he completed it by Easter of the same year. In this first form, written in prose, it was played (as already mentioned) in the amateur theatre at Weimar, Goethe taking the part of Orestes and Corona Schröter that of Iphigenie—a glorious pair. Subsequently it was subjected to no fewer than four recastings; in 1780 he did it into “free” iambic verse; in 1781 put it again into prose; and in 1786 rewrote it partly in prose and partly in iambic verse. It was this last draft which, on the advice of Herder, he took with him to Italy with the object of improving the versification, which Herder found faulty. On the shore of Lake Garda he began the work of revision, and continued it during his journey to Rome, where, assisted by Moritz in the technicalities of prosody, he completed it in January, 1787. Its reception by the friends to whom he read it in Rome was ominous of how it would be received by the world at large; only from Angelica Kauffmann did it find a sympathetic response.<sup>1</sup>

The play of Euripides supplied the groundwork for that of Goethe, and it is necessary to have its argument before us if we are to understand how Goethe

<sup>1</sup> It appeared in 1787 in the third volume of Göschen's edition of Goethe's works.

employed it for his own purposes. Orestes, pursued by the Furies for the slaying of his mother Clytemnestra, the murderer of his father Agamemnon, is informed by the oracle of Apollo that by carrying off the statue of Diana from her temple in Taurica he will be relieved from their pursuit. Accompanied by his friend Pylades, he lands in Taurica. Both are made prisoners, and, as strangers, by the custom of the country they are doomed as a sacrifice to the goddess. The priestess of the temple, however, proves to be Orestes' sister Iphigenie, who had been borne thither by Diana when on the point of being sacrificed by her father Agamemnon. Mutual recognition follows, and Iphigenia suggests a stratagem by which all three should escape with the image in their possession. She tells Thoas, the king of the country, that the two strangers as bloodguilty, and the image as having been defiled by their hands, must be cleansed in the sea before the sacrifice could be acceptable to the goddess. In the execution of this plan they succeed in embarking on the ship which had brought the two friends, but are overtaken by Thoas, who, however, is commanded by Athena to let them go in safety. Such is the argument of Euripides' play, and it is to be observed of it, as compared with that of Goethe, that it is pervaded by no lofty moral ideas, and that the three leading characters are merely clever schemers. In the *dénouement* Orestes is rescued from the Furies by no moral purification, but simply by carrying off the image of Diana.

It was this framework which Goethe had to inform with those ideals that have been described, and the process necessitated a complete transformation of the characters and aims of the four persons he took over from Euripides. The first note struck in Goethe's play transports us into another world than the Greek. Iphigenie, in soliloquy, reveals her noble nature, and we are prepared to expect that she will be incapable of aught that is

unworthy. An exile among a barbarian people, and ignorant of the fate of her parents and of her brother Orestes, she passionately longs for her home, and laments the lot of women, completely under the dominance of man. The other two scenes of the First Act explain what suggested this reflection. A change in the circumstances of Thoas, the king of the country, has altered his relations to her. Through the influence of Iphigenie, as priestess of Diana, he had abolished the ancient custom of sacrificing to the goddess every stranger captured on his coasts. His only son had been slain in battle, and, as there was no prospect of an heir, there was growing dissatisfaction among his subjects, who regarded the nation's calamity as the chastisement of Diana for the disuse of the ancient custom. Thoas, who is represented as fully appreciating the lofty character of Iphigenie, gives her the choice of two alternatives; either she must consent to become his queen or the ancient custom must be revived. This is the first test that displays her moral quality. She refuses Thoas's offer. To begin with, as a priestess she cannot give her hand in marriage. Her second reason opens up the course which the action will follow. She reveals to Thoas that she is of the race of Tantalus, accursed of the gods; her union with him, therefore, would involve him in the curse of her race. She is sternly reminded by Thoas what her decision implies; two strangers have been seized on the coast, and it will be her duty to officiate at their sacrifice. The two strangers are her brother Orestes and his friend Pylades, who, in accordance with the oracle of Apollo, have come to carry off the image of Diana as the means of effecting Orestes' deliverance from the Furies. So far as Pylades and Orestes are concerned, therefore, their motive is the same as that which is assigned to them by Euripides, and it is only through their contact with Iphigenie that the action of the drama is lifted to a higher plane. Her first interview is with Pylades, who makes known to



her the fate of her father, but does not reveal to her what had happened to Clytemnestra, nor who he and Orestes are. Here, as elsewhere, he exhibits himself as a cunning Greek, who, as he avows, takes Ulysses as his pattern hero.<sup>1</sup> Then follows her meeting with Orestes, who is cast in a higher mould than Pylades. Let there be truth between us two, he says, and, putting aside the tale of his friend, tells the whole facts regarding the slaying of Clytemnestra, and avows himself as Orestes. On the dread information he retires, but immediately returns when Iphigenie reveals herself as his sister. He is horror-stricken at the discovery, as it seems to him the consummation of the wrath of the gods on their house, seeing he must die as a sacrificial victim by her hands. In vain Iphigenie represents to him that, as there are powers that summon him below, a sister's prayers may avail to draw the sympathies of the powers above, and, torn by a visitation of the Furies, he falls in a stupor. In his unconsciousness he has a vision of his kindred in Hades reconciled and living in amity, and of himself joining their circle, and he awakes with his spirit calmed and with the assurance that Iphigenie will prove his saviour. In this last scene of the Third Act, according to Goethe, we have the turning-point of the drama, for now comes the supreme test of Iphigenie, from which she emerges victorious and by her victory proves the power of "pure humanity." Pylades, and not Iphigenia as in Euripides, suggests a plan for the escape of all three with the image, but the plan involves the deceiving of Thoas. Iphigenie, knowing that on its execution depend the lives of her brother and his friend, at first gives her consent, but, in accordance with the character assigned to her, the nobler motive prevails and she reveals the whole plot to Thoas.<sup>2</sup> By an appeal to

<sup>1</sup> He represents to her that he and Orestes are brothers.

<sup>2</sup> According to Aulus Gellius, Pericles held it wrong to do a good turn to a friend, if by so doing we offend the gods; he represents Pericles as saying: *δεῖ μὲν συμπράττειν τοῖς φίλοις, ἀλλὰ μέχρι τῶν δειῶν.*—Noot. Att., I. iii. 20.

his better nature and to man's highest instincts she prevails on him to permit herself, her brother, and Pylades to depart for Greece. Thus by no supernatural intervention, as is the case in the play of Euripides, but by the working of a noble nature, Orestes is saved from the inherited curse of his race.

In a review of Manzoni's tragedy, *Adelchi* (1822), Goethe has some remarks which suggest that he had his own *Iphigenie* in his mind when he made them. Manzoni had been blamed for attributing sentiments to his characters out of keeping with the barbaric age to which they belong, and Goethe justifies him as follows. Though it may seem a paradox, he says, all poetry is necessarily associated with anachronism. If in evoking the past, the poet is to interest his own contemporaries, he must assign to it a higher culture than it actually possessed. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, all the Greek tragic poets live and breathe in anachronism. In our own time, he adds, we have seen the same procedure in the case of the Middle Ages; we have made them live again by informing them with ideas and sentiments that are really foreign to them. Despite this reasoning, however, it has been precisely the incongruity between the character of Iphigenie and her surroundings that have been a stumbling-block to many critics in their appreciation of Goethe's play. The original framework on which it is constructed occasionally obtrudes itself, and a jarring note is the result. The play, therefore, has something of the nature of a *tour de force*, and hence, as one critic has said, "something factitious; something devised and determined by the thinker, not given by the necessity of nature herself; something too artificial, therefore, too deliberately studied—as the French say, *trop voulu*."<sup>1</sup>

Since its first appearance successive German

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold in his essay entitled "A French Critic on Goethe." Dr. R. M. Meyer is of the same opinion as Arnold. Among Goethe's chief works, he says, there is none more *gewollt* than *Iphigenie*.

critics have pointed out other defects inherent in the structure of *Iphigenie*. As he had done in the case of *Egmont*, Schiller subjected it to a searching criticism in which praise is tempered with blame. He called it "an echo of a Greek poem," a "soul-drama," an "Elysian piece"; but, on the other hand, he found it lacking in the essential qualities of a dramatic work—in concreteness, in life, in action. Moreover, he thought the dialogue too overlaid with epithets, the agony of Orestes too prolonged for the feelings of the reader, and the "moral casuistry" excessive.<sup>1</sup> Later German critics have for the most part accepted Schiller's strictures as just, and they have advanced others of their own.<sup>2</sup> All the characters, they tell us, speak in the same style, and the expression in the play generally is monotonous and even artificial in its studied avoidance of violent effects. Criticism has also been passed on the versification as frequently harsh and not seldom vitiated by actual lapses in the measure—faults, it may be said, which were perhaps to be looked for, seeing that Goethe had no models for iambic blank verse before him and had to build it up for himself.

Yet, after all reserves, *Iphigenie* has been universally recognized as a work which the world would not willingly lose. There is nothing quite like it either in German or in any other literature. It is not a reproduction of Greek models as some of Goethe's contemporaries regarded it. As has been frequently pointed out, it is Greek only in the slowness of its movement, in the loftiness of its poise, its pervading restraint. Its tone, sentiment, and attitude to life are essentially modern, and in the ideal it embodies, philosophy and religion may find a common ground. If religion be "morality touched

<sup>1</sup> Goethe himself, later in life, judged *Iphigenie* with severity. Had he known Greek things better, he told Riemer, he would not have written it. He described it as "*verteufelt*" human, meaning that its characters were abstract ideals rather than individuals.

<sup>2</sup> Some German critics have gone so far as to compare Goethe's work unfavourably with that of Euripides.



with emotion," Iphigenie is truly religious by her character and by the accent of her speech when she champions good against evil, the higher against the lower elements of human nature. It is in an atmosphere of broad and genial humanity that the play moves. Orestes by his direct dealing with himself and with Iphigenie, and Thoas with his magnanimity rising above his own selfish interests, represent that natural virtue which Goethe held to be inherent in man as are his lower propensities. But in Iphigenie this natural virtue is the passionate aspiration after all goodness and the passionate desire to make it prevail. She bewails the fact that the position of women renders them so impotent to exercise the powers for good with which nature had endowed them—

Ich rechte mit den Göttern nicht; allein  
Der Frauen Zustand ist beklagenswert.

I do not with the gods' decrees contend,  
Yet is the lot of woman pitiful.

The purifying and ennobling influence of women—a faith that was abiding in Goethe—is, indeed, one of the recurrences in the play. Orestes, in the words which express the motive of the whole, says of Iphigenie—

Gewalt und List, der Männer höchster Ruhm,  
Wird durch die Wahrheit dieser hohen Seele  
Beschämt, und reines kindliches Vertrauen  
Zu einem edeln Manne wird belohnt.

Cunning and force, the chiefest boast of men,  
By means of this high soul's sheer truthfulness,  
Are put to shame, and pure and childlike trust  
Placed in a noble man finds its reward.

Goethe's play naturally suggests a comparison with the dramatic work of another poet widely differing from him in character and genius—the *Comus* of Milton. Both are pæans of an ideal, and in both it is a woman who embodies it. Milton's theme is the glorification of the virtues of chastity

and temperance ; Goethe's that of truth between man and man. *Iphigenie* has the larger scope, as in the treatment of this theme wider emotional interests are brought into play than in *Comus*. The Lady in *Comus* is the abstract embodiment of the virtue she represents ; and so Milton meant to depict her. Her character excites our admiration and reverence, but, as her part calls for no manifestation of ordinary human affections, she does not attract us. *Iphigenie*, on the other hand, is a woman complete, with all her strength and weakness. She is passionately attached to her brother, and treasures the memory of her father in spite of his blood-guiltiness. High-souled though she is, she is timid and distrustful of herself, and it is by a woman's methods of gentle persuasion that she wins ascendancy and attains her purpose. In her parting prayer to Thoas that they might separate as friends, she reveals all the pathetic tenderness which is the attractive trait of her nature—

Leb' wohl ! O wende dich zu uns und gieb  
Ein holdes Wort des Abschieds mir zurück !  
Dann schwellt der Wind die Segel sanfter an,  
Und Thränen fließen lindernder vom Auge  
Des Scheidenden. Leb' wohl ! und reiche mir  
Zum Pfand der alten Freundschaft deine Rechte.

Farewell ! O turn to us and speak a word  
Of kindly parting in response to mine.  
So will the wind more softly swell the sails,  
And tears more gently flow from the eyes of her  
Who leaves thee. Fare thee well. Thy hand extend  
As pledge that ancient friendship still abides.

Side by side with *Iphigenie* in the list of Goethe's works stands *Torquato Tasso*—a product of the same period and the same inspiration, and, like *Iphigenie*, though in far greater degree, a biographical document. In Tasso's poetry Goethe had been interested from his boyhood, as the reading of a German translation of *Jerusalem Delivered* had been one of his childish delights—a fact which he notes both in his *Autobiography* and in *Wilhelm Meister*. At a later time,

in the period of his storm and stress, his interest in the poem was transferred to its author and to his tragic career, in which he saw a certain similitude to his own. It was through excess of sensibility, unchecked by steady self-control, that Tasso had become a mental wreck, and Goethe, at all times conscious of a morbid strain in his own nature, saw in Tasso's fate a dread warning to himself. When settled in Weimar, he could find a further resemblance between Tasso's life and his. Tasso, too, was a poet living at a Court and had known its uncongeniality to the poetic temperament. In the career and fate of Tasso he thus saw a theme in which he could embody his own experience, and in so doing, as in the case of previous creations, cleanse his mind of insistently unpleasant memories. Once and again he tells us that *Tasso* was written under an irresistible impulse—the impulse to rid himself of the morbid impressions of those years in Weimar which had finally driven him to seek refuge in Italy.

Apparently, however, Tasso was conceived and begun in a tolerably happy mood. It was under the inspiration of Frau von Stein that the work was commenced, though by a bitter irony its completion was to be associated with their final estrangement. It is uncertain where its first conception occurred to him, and when he began its actual composition; but we know that he had made some progress with it in 1780, and that in November of the following year he had finished the first two Acts.<sup>1</sup> But, like others of his greater works, *Tasso* was to be “of as slow growth as an orange tree.” Not till six years later, and then in Italy not in Weimar, was the work resumed. In the interval, as we know, his conceptions of literary form had undergone a radical change, and, moreover, the publication of Serass's life of Tasso had thrown new light on his hero's career. He now found the two acts he had written “flaccid and misty,” and that the whole would have to be conceived afresh

<sup>1</sup> Like *Iphigenie*, *Tasso* was first written in prose.



and composed in harmony with his altered views. As we saw, he worked at the manuscript on his way to Sicily from Naples. But it was not, apparently, till the last weeks of his second residence in Rome that the new plan of the poem was fully formed in his mind, or that he addressed himself seriously to its execution. As an appropriate companion in the mood in which he quitted Rome, he found solace in working at it on his journey home. In the public gardens at Florence, he tells us, he wrote the passages (probably in the Fifth Act), which painfully reminded him of the likeness between Tasso's fate and his own. The Italian journey, however, did not see the completion of the work, and it was not till more than a year after his return to Weimar that its last lines were written (July, 1789),<sup>1</sup> by which date the bond between him and Frau von Stein had been permanently broken.<sup>2</sup>

A brief sketch of the play will illustrate the significance of Goethe's remark that "it was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh." The characters are five in number: Alphonso, Duke of Ferrara; the Princess Leonora d'Este, his sister; Leonora Sanvitale, Countess of Scandiano; Tasso; and Antonio Montecatino, Secretary of State. All have important parts in the development of the drama. The whole action takes place within a few hours of the same day, and the scene shifts only from the garden to the palace of Belriguardo, one of the Duke's country residences. The play opens in the garden on a beautiful spring morning with a conversation between the princess and her friend Leonora. The scene at once reminds us of the world to which we are about to be introduced—the world of an Italian prince of the Renaissance. The garden is adorned with the busts of the epic poets,

<sup>1</sup> It appeared in the ninth volume of Göschen's edition of Goethe's works.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, she expressed subsequently her great admiration of *Tasso*. To her son she wrote: "Lies einmal den *Tasso* wieder; jede Zeile ist Goldes wert. Er ist mir nie so in die Seele übergegangen."

among them those of Virgil and Ariosto, and the two ladies are habited as shepherdesses. They playfully crown the busts of Virgil and Ariosto, and their talk is in keeping with their assumed parts; it is of the charms of the country, of the glory that accrues to princes from the patronage of genius, of delight in converse with learned men and specially with poets. Thus the conversation naturally leads to the subject of Tasso, in whom both are equally interested and whom they depict with the insight of accomplished women, each from her own point of view. As he is depicted by both, he is a dreamer for whom the actual world does not exist, and who lives in a universe of his own creation into which nothing discordant is permitted to enter. In the second scene, in which the Duke joins the two ladies, we have a further glimpse into Tasso's character, in certain traits of which we see that Goethe is describing his own. In Tasso's procrastinating habit of composition, in his avoidance of the society of the Court, we have Goethe himself. From another characteristic of Tasso, however, Goethe, so far as we know, was free—a morbid suspicion of all with whom he came in contact, of which no persuasion could cure him. In the reflections by the princess and the Duke on this trait in Tasso we have that other side of Goethe's nature which saved him from Tasso's fate. Only by contact with one's fellow-men and direct participation in the actualities of life can a man's nature be kept sound and whole, and it is in this context that occur the best-known lines in the play—put in the mouth of Leonora—

Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,  
Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt.

In the next scene we are again reminded of the period in which the drama is laid. Tasso appears with a manuscript in his hand which he diffidently presents to the Duke. It is the completed *Jerusalem*

*Delivered* for which his friends have so long been eagerly looking. In acknowledgment of the lustre that the poem will confer on himself and his Court, the Duke bids his sister crown the poet with a laurel wreath, thus assigning him a place with Virgil and Ariosto whose crowned busts had suggested the act. In Tasso's passionate deprecation of the honour we have another illustration of his lack of the qualities of sane manhood. Timid self-distrust seems, indeed, to be the basis of his character from which all his illusions follow. In the fourth and last scene of the First Act the action of the play, such as it is, is set in movement. Antonio, the Duke's secretary, arrives hotfoot from Rome, where he has successfully carried through an important piece of business in the interests of his master. The contrast between the characters of Tasso and Antonio is one of the chief motives of the drama, and it is almost unduly emphasized in their first encounter. Antonio receives the advances of Tasso coldly, and, with a rudeness that might have given offence to a coarser nature than Tasso's, delivers a panegyric on Ariosto with a directly invidious implication. From his late exaltation Tasso is thrown into a state of depression by the words of Antonio which influences all his future thought and action. In the remaining acts of the play we see the gradual development of the morbid strain in Tasso's character displaying itself in groundless suspicions of all around him, who are, in reality, endeavouring with anxious solicitude to remove his delusions. At the instance of the Duke, Antonio seeks reconciliation with Tasso; but the result is a quarrel between them in which Tasso draws his sword, and is, in consequence, put under arrest. The princess and Leonora agree that a temporary removal from the Court may have a good effect on him, and the Duke and Antonio concur, the latter with grave doubts as to the result. But the plan is wrecked by an incident which is the climax of the play. Tasso had long indulged a secret passion for the princess,



and persuaded himself that the passion was returned. In reality, her feeling for Tasso was purely Platonic. Timid, lacking in vitality, but with a romantic imagination, she was only attracted to Tasso by his gift of expressing the cravings and aspirations of her own nature. In a moment of infatuation he throws himself into her arms, and her revulsion and the appearance of the Duke and Antonio result in his complete mental collapse. The concluding scene of the play has presented a double puzzle to successive critics. Left alone with Antonio, Tasso at first breaks into the accents of a soul in despair, but gradually returning upon himself he finds in Antonio a consoler and a refuge in his need. Is it consistent with Antonio's character and his conduct to Tasso, as we have been led to conceive them, that this part should be assigned to him? His insolence to Tasso on the occasion of their first meeting, and the impression he gives of being a mere selfish man of the world, would seem to debar him from being Tasso's good genius in the end. What appears probable is that in recasting the play Goethe changed certain motives which occasion the inconsistency. The other question raised by this concluding scene regards the ultimate fate of Tasso. Are we to understand that his mental wreck is complete, or that he eventually recovers his self-possession? Tasso's last words leave us in uncertainty. If the play were meant to be a tragedy, the former alternative would be the natural ending, but Goethe was naturally so averse to tragic issues that he invariably tried to elude them. In the ambiguity of the closing scene of the play we may, perhaps, see an illustration of this characteristic. The figure with which Tasso, in his final speech, illustrates his fate may be interpreted as implying an assurance that he had become conscious of his illusions and was prepared to face the future with a renovated spirit. He compares himself to a shipwrecked sailor who is rescued by clinging to a rock; and to Antonio, whose hand he

had taken when it was offered, he says that such a rock he had found in him.

It has been said of *Werther* that it was "the act of a conqueror and a high-priest of art."<sup>1</sup> With even greater truth may this be said of *Tasso*. In *Werther* he had made free with the domestic concerns of two private persons for the purposes of art; in *Tasso* he used a like freedom with the Weimar Court which none of its residents could fail to recognize. Goethe, Herder caustically said on reading the play, "can do nothing but idealize himself and copy himself." It is Goethe who tells us that Carl August disapproved of the subject of *Tasso*, and we can understand the reasons.<sup>2</sup> For Carl August the reading of the play could hardly have been an unmixed pleasure. He may have been gratified by the eulogies of the Duke of Ferrara's munificence to men of genius as an indirect flattery of himself, but it cannot have been so pleasant to read the counsels given to rulers and to be reminded that a prince does himself honour in patronizing art and learning. To the courtiers at Weimar, also, *Tasso* could hardly fail to give offence, containing, as it does, much that might be interpreted as veiled censure of themselves. The majority of them had always regarded Goethe as an upstart favourite, and they had grumbled that he was in receipt of his salary as a Minister while he was enjoying himself in Italy. In Antonio's jealousy of Tasso they saw their own feelings represented in odious colours; and the high regard paid to Tasso by the Duke and his sister implied a censure of their inability to appreciate genius. And if in *Tasso* Goethe has taken such liberties with his surroundings in Weimar, he has dealt no less frankly with himself. No one acquainted with him in Weimar could fail to recognize a portrayal of his own character and his own

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe to the Duke, March 28, 1788. In the same context Goethe says that, had he not begun *Tasso*, he would not, at the date when he wrote, have chosen its subject.

experience in those of Tasso—a poet patronized like himself by a Court, and similarly infatuated with love for a woman above himself in rank. It would seem, indeed, that Goethe came to have a consciousness that in Tasso he had gone beyond bounds in his self-revelation. “Perhaps,” he said at a later day, “I had transfused more of my own heart’s blood into my *Tasso* than is reasonable.” Was that why, as he also said, he never read *Tasso* after its publication?<sup>1</sup>

Yet, as we know, Tasso, no more than Werther<sup>2</sup> and Clavigo, was Goethe. The play, in which he is the principal character, is itself a proof of this. The poet who created it was completely master of himself; in the phrase of Charles Lamb, he arranged the subject, it did not direct him. As has been said, Goethe was Tasso and Antonio combined—the supersensitive poet and the experienced man of the world. And the substance of *Tasso* bears witness to the dual nature of its author. If sentiment and passion abound in it, they are balanced by an equal amount of weighty reflection. It is, indeed, the main fault objected to *Tasso* as a drama that all the characters, men and women alike, reflect too much and act too little. Yet, if thus faulty as a dramatic work, it is precisely its richness of wisdom, expressed in language the purest and most harmonious, if not the most penetrating and powerful, found in all Goethe’s work, that commends it to those to whom it appeals. According to Goethe himself, the underlying idea of *Tasso* is “the lack of adjustment between genius and the realities of life”; but, in truth, he has poured into it his ripest reflections on many subjects besides. There are two themes especially which receive such prominence in the play that they may claim to be among its leading motives. The one is the function of the poet as a force in the life of humanity—a function which Goethe himself

<sup>1</sup> It was in 1827 that Goethe made the remark above quoted.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe, after Ampère, called Tasso “einen gesteigerten Werther.”



took so seriously. It is a theme woven into the very texture of the play, seeing that the one concern of all the characters is to safeguard the genius of a poet. All of them, even the worldly Antonio, are made to pay their tribute to the poet's gift; in words which are among the best known in the play Leonora thus describes what he accomplishes for the service of man:—

Sein Auge weilt auf dieser Erde kaum ;  
 Sein Ohr vernimmt den Einklang der Natur ;  
 Was die Geschichte reicht, das Leben gibt,  
 Sein Busen nimmt es gleich und willig auf ;  
 Das weit Zerstreute sammelt sein Gemüth,  
 Und sein Gefühl belebt das Unbelebte.  
 Oft adelt er, was uns gemein erschien,  
 Und das Geschätzte wird vor ihm zu nichts.  
 In diesem eignen Zauberkreise wandelt  
 Der wunderbare Mann und zieht uns an,  
 Mit ihm zu wandeln, Teil an ihm zu nehmen.

His eye roams far beyond this earth of ours ;  
 His ear takes in all nature's harmonies ;  
 The storied past, what life itself presents,  
 Swiftly he seizes, gladly makes his own.  
 Things wide dispersed his heart in one combines,  
 His spirit to the lifeless giveth life ;  
 Oft he ennobles what to us seemed mean,  
 And what we treasure is to him as naught.  
 Within a magic circle of his own he walks,  
 The wondrous man, and draws us ever on  
 With him to walk and all his dream to share.

The other theme is one which is compact with Goethe's ideal of "pure humanity"—the worth of woman. *Tasso*, indeed, like *Iphigenie*, may be regarded as one long tribute to woman's power as a beneficent agency in educating the nobler elements in human nature. In the feelings and actions of the Princess and Leonora we have exemplified with consummate delicacy the means and methods by which the spirit of woman permeates and influences the society in which she moves. In the mouth of the Princess Goethe puts words (addressed to *Tasso*)

which may be taken as a commentary on the famous concluding lines of the Second Part of *Faust*<sup>1</sup>:—

Willst du genau erfahren, was sich ziemt ;  
 So frage nur bei edlen Frauen an.  
 Denn ihnen ist am meisten dran gelegen,  
 Dass alles wohl sich zieme, was geschieht,  
 Die Schicklichkeit umgibt mit einer Mauer  
 Das zarte, leicht verletzbliche Geschlecht.  
 Wo Sittlichkeit regiert, regieren sie,  
 Und wo die Frechheit herrscht, da sind sie nichts.  
 Und wirst du die Geschlechter beide fragen :  
 Nach Freiheit strebt der Mann, das Weib nach Sitte.

If what is fitting thou would'st fully learn,  
 Only of noble women then inquire.  
 For ever it is women's chief concern  
 That all that happens, happen as befits,  
 As with a wall, doth seemliness surround  
 The gentle, sensitive and tender sex.  
 Where moral order reigns, there woman reigns ;  
 Where shamelessness bears sway, there is she naught.  
 And if of man and woman you inquire :  
 He strives for freedom ; she for what is right.

*Tasso* was received by the critics and the general public with even greater coldness than *Iphigenie*. It was found artificial, effeminate, devoid of dramatic interest. Only by slow degrees did it come to take the place it now holds in German literature, and, even to-day, as we are assured by one of Goethe's latest biographers, it is not a favourite with the majority of cultivated German readers. For the stage it is intrinsically unfitted, as its essential interest lies in its delicate psychological analysis of a group of characters moving in an atmosphere too rarefied to be appreciated by the ordinary theatre-goer.<sup>2</sup> It had been the ambition and the hope of Goethe by works like *Tasso* and *Iphigenie* to redeem Germany from Gothic ideals, and in their place to substitute the

<sup>1</sup> Das Ewig-weibliche  
 Zieht uns hinan.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe himself was averse to its being staged. It was played in Weimar in 1807 with "extraordinary success."

classical ideals in which he had himself found satisfaction both as a man and as an artist. According to his own testimony, the cold reception of *Tasso* and *Iphigenie* was one among several experiences that during the years immediately following his return to Weimar after his Italian journey discouraged him from poetic production on a like scale. Was the German public wrong in its judgment on his attempt to modernize ancient models?



## CHAPTER XXII

FRAU VON STEIN—CHRISTIANE VULPIUS—THE  
*ROMAN ELEGIES*

1788—1789

IN his account of his botanical studies, written in his sixty-eighth year, Goethe thus describes his state of mind during the period immediately following his return to Weimar from his Italian journey. "From Italy, rich in form, I was flung back into formless Germany, to exchange a cheerful sky for a gloomy one. My friends, instead of offering me comfort and attracting me to them again, drove me to despair. My ecstasies over objects, distant and hardly known, my suffering, my complaints over what I had lost appeared to offend them. I missed all sympathy; no one understood my language."

The state of mind described in this passage, which is confirmed by the testimony of others at the period to which it refers, is certainly a remarkable commentary on what Italy had done for Goethe. He had found it necessary to leave Weimar for a time, as he himself tells us, because his morbid feelings had rendered its society intolerable. In Italy, as he also tells us, he had effectually cured himself of such feelings, yet, when he returned to Weimar, he found its society as intolerable as when he left it. Now, however, his estrangement was due not to unstrung nerves but to a different cause, and is illustrative of a side of his nature exemplified at every period of his life. Under whatever influence he had come in the past, he was for the time obsessed by it. As a youth, in Leipzig, in Strassburg, in association

with the Court of Darmstadt, and in Weimar, he had successively taken on the hues of his surroundings. When he went to Italy, he was in mature manhood and had a manifold experience behind him, yet he was so completely subjugated by his experience there, that he was unable to see men and things through any other medium. "Goethe," his friend Knebel said of him at this time, "can see no other point of view but his own." Obsessed by his Italian memories and his new conceptions of art, he insisted on inflicting them on his friends in Weimar, and took offence because they did not share his enthusiasm nor accept his new opinions. The unreasonableness of this demand does not seem even to have occurred to him, and we naturally conclude that this is but another illustration of that egotism with which he has been generally charged. But there is another explanation which is perfectly consistent with what we know of him. At no period of his life does Goethe strike us as a man of strong will.<sup>1</sup> In youth he was the prey of successive passions which he was unable to master. He sought relief from these passions in various literary productions, but they did not result in self-conquest. He was as Wertherian after he had written *Werther* as before he wrote it. The whole story of his relations to Frau von Stein is the revelation of one incapable of ruling himself, though he clearly saw that these relations were contrary to nature and could only have one end. It is another evidence of his inherent weakness of will that his literary career is strewn with fragments of works, begun with enthusiasm and dropped as soon as begun.<sup>2</sup> It is his own frequent remark, at all periods of his life, that only under some external compulsion was he able to persist in tasks undertaken. In the prosecution of his scientific

<sup>1</sup> In the portraits of Goethe as a youth it is observable that the chin is weak and feminine.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, during the period of his intimacy with Goethe, frequently impressed on him the necessity of exerting will-power in his poetical undertakings.

studies he showed a steadier persistence than in his literary undertakings, but this was not the result of concentrated will, but of a passionate interest in the subjects themselves which urged him on the path of discovery till the end was attained. It may be regarded, therefore, as another instance of weakness of will that, on his return from Italy, he was so dominated by the ideals he had formed in that country that he was incapable of seeing any other vision but his own. The folly of expecting other people to think like ourselves is a maxim on which he frequently insisted in his later life. Had he laid the maxim to heart on his return to Weimar, he would not have spent the succeeding years in the morose isolation for which he blames the world, but which was, in truth, due to himself.

Apart from the general lack of sympathy of which Goethe complains, the conditions under which he thenceforth lived in Weimar could hardly have been more favourable to the life he meant to lead. From Italy he had besought the Duke to relieve him of his official duties on his return, and the Duke had responded nobly. During the remainder of his life in Weimar he retained the salaries he had received for the various offices he had formerly held, without performing their duties, and he was privileged to sit in the Council and the Chamber whenever his own avocations permitted. Such public duties as he did undertake were congenial to him, and furthered the interests he had at heart. He was charged with the superintendence of the mines at Ilmenau, which fell in with his studies in mineralogy. It was in the line of his own interests, also, that he became responsible for the management of the literary and artistic institutions of the Duchy including the University at Jena, and, a few years later, the directorship of a new theatre that was founded in Weimar. Moreover, from his own testimony, frequently repeated, his home relations, such as he made them, were all that could be desired for the undistracted prosecution of his various studies.



Yet he was not happy, and the main reason he assigned for his unhappiness was the lack of sympathy from his friends in Weimar and the world in general. But there were other reasons which, in the case of most men, would have been sufficient to disturb their equanimity.

There was one person in Weimar to whose reception of him on his return he must have looked forward with some uneasiness. Before his Italian journey his relations with Frau von Stein had been severely strained, and she had naturally regarded his secret flight as a direct intimation that she had ceased to be what she had been to him. In her first communications with him in Italy she had signified the interpretation she put on his action, but they had resumed their correspondence, on his part in as effusive tones as ever. Yet, in their hearts both must have felt that, whatever might be their relations in the future, they could not be what they had been in the past. Even if Frau von Stein had received him with the most responsive sympathy, she could not, after his Italian experience, have filled that place in his mind and heart which she had filled in the past. As it was, through the fault of both their final breach was to be effected under circumstances which have the nature of a nemesis on a relation which had been unnatural from its beginning.

In the narrow Weimar circle it was impossible for them to avoid occasional meetings, but from the first it was evident that there was no reciprocal warmth between them. For a time they kept up the semblance of former relations; as in old days, she sent him breakfasts, and her son Fritz, for whom Goethe had a strong liking, and who was devoted to Goethe, was a link of intercourse. It is from his letters to her that we learn how the final breach came, and we have, therefore, only his side of the story. During the year that followed his return to Weimar he wrote to her only eight times; once he had written to her twice and thrice every day. The

general impression we receive from such letters as he did write is that he regarded himself as the injured party.

What was ominous was that, as time passed, their relations did not improve. In August, about two months after his return, he refused to invite her to tea at his house<sup>1</sup> with some other ladies, for the reason, he told the wife of Herder, that she was "out of humour." In the same month she invited him to visit her at her place at Kochberg, and he refused her invitation in the following terms: "I am in such dread of heaven and earth that it would be with difficulty I could come to you."<sup>2</sup> The weather makes me quite unhappy and I find myself comfortable nowhere except in my own room when a fire is lit and it may rain as it pleases."<sup>3</sup> In September he did pay her a visit, but accompanied by three others, among whom was Frau Herder, who relates the incidents of the visit. Goethe, she tells us, was in high spirits all the way to Kochberg, but his mood changed on their arrival. While their hostess gave her other guests a kindly greeting, she received Goethe "without heart," with the result that he was "out of humour during the rest of the day." Five months later (February, 1789) we have another letter from Goethe to her which shows that she had found further ground of offence in some part of his conduct. "If you care to hear it," he wrote, "I would like to tell you that your reproaches, though they pain me at the moment, leave no sense of annoyance or anger in my heart. Even *these* I know how to dispose of; if you must put up with a great deal in me, it is only fair that I should suffer from you in return. It is so much better, too, for people to settle accounts in a friendly fashion rather than to be always insisting on reaching a complete mutual understanding, and then, if that fails, to keep out of one another's way. With you least of all can I expostulate, as by every

<sup>1</sup> The Jägerhaus in the Park, where Goethe was now residing.

<sup>2</sup> He still keeps up the old form "du."

<sup>3</sup> The season was unusually cold and wet.

reckoning I am your debtor. For the rest, if we consider how much one has to put up with in everybody, we shall surely be all the readier to forgive each other. Farewell and love me. When the opportunity comes, you shall again hear something of my delightful secrets."

It was apparently about a month later that Frau von Stein made a discovery which finally dispelled any illusions she may have entertained regarding her future relations to Goethe. She now learned that she no longer held the first place in his life and that her place had been taken by another, and one, moreover, whose character and antecedents humiliated her in her own eyes and in the eyes of the world. This new *liaison* of Goethe had, in fact, begun four weeks after his return from Italy, and it had been carried on with such secrecy that it was only after the intervening months that it came to her knowledge. Goethe's new love was Christiane Vulpius, the daughter of a scapegrace advocate in Weimar, who had died two years before, leaving a large family in straitened circumstances. Along with her sister she worked in a neighbouring flower factory, and contributed to the family maintenance. Before his departure to Italy he had seen her at the factory and had noted her good looks and her mother wit, and he had been of some service to her brother, a characterless youth who had gained some popularity as a writer of tales and a translator of French and Italian romances. It was the affairs of this brother that occasioned her meeting with Goethe—a meeting to be counted one of the decisive events of his life. On her way to his house in the Park to solicit his further interest for her brother, he met her and, ever susceptible, he was moved by her voluptuous beauty. She was twenty-three years of age. As he describes her,<sup>1</sup> she was a brunette, with abundant locks,

<sup>1</sup> Einst erschien sie auch mir, ein braunliches Mädchen, die Haare,  
 Fielen ihr dunkel und reich über die Stirne herab,  
 Kurze Locken ringelten sich ums zierliche Hälschen,  
 Ungeflochtenes Haar krauste vom Scheitel sich auf.



clustering round a beautiful neck, and a feminine observer compares her to a "young Dionysus." The *liaison* began, and there had been nightly assignations from the time he met her. Such was the new love for whom the Baroness von Stein found herself set aside.

She appears to have kept silence for some time regarding her discovery.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of May, however, on the eve of her departure to Ems for the benefit of her health, she sent a letter to Goethe which he received after she was gone, and on which he ruminated for some weeks before writing a reply. His answer is dated June 1, 1789, and is as follows:—

"Thank you for your letter which you left behind for me, though at the same time it has grieved me in more ways than one. I delayed answering it because in such a case it is difficult to be candid and not to give offence. How much I love you and how much I recognize my duty towards you and Fritz, I have shown by my return from Italy. According to the Duke's wish I should still be in that country; Herder went there, and as I did not foresee that I could be of any use to the young Prince, I had scarcely anything in my mind save you and Fritz. What I have left behind in Italy, I don't wish to repeat; you have received my confidence on that subject in a sufficiently unfriendly spirit. Unhappily, on my return, you were in a peculiar mood, and I candidly confess that I found the way in which you and others received me extremely painful. I saw Herder, saw the Duchess depart [for Italy], I saw a seat in the carriage, which was urgently offered me, left empty. I remained behind for the sake of my friends, just as it was for their sake that I had returned, and, at the same moment, had to hear it persistently repeated that I might as well have stayed away, that I showed no interest in people, and so forth. And all this before there could be any talk of

<sup>1</sup> Her son Fritz met Christiane in the Park, and reported the meeting to her.

a relation which appears to give you so much offence. And what is the nature of this relation? Who suffers any loss by it? Who makes any claim on the sentiments which I bestow on the poor creature; who on the hours I pass with her? Ask Fritz, ask the Herders, ask one who is on familiar terms with me if I am less sympathetic, less communicative, less active in the interests of my friends than formerly; if I do not rather, for the first time, really belong to them and to society. And it must, indeed, be through a miracle if I have lost only in your case the best, the deepest relation of all. How keenly I have felt that the relation still exists when, on occasion, I have found you in a mood to talk to me on interesting subjects! But I freely confess that the manner in which you have hitherto treated me is intolerable. When I was disposed to be talkative, you reduced me to silence; when I was communicative you accused me of indifference; when I was active in the interests of my friends, you blamed me for coldness and neglect. You checked my every look, found fault with my movements and my general manner, and constantly made me feel *mal à mon aise*. How should confidence and candour flourish when you thus repulse me with deliberate ill-humour? I would like to add much more if I were not afraid that, in your present temper, it would rather offend than propitiate you. Unfortunately you have long despised my advice about coffee,<sup>1</sup> and followed a regimen in the highest degree deleterious to your health. It is not enough that it is already hard to overcome many impressions by moral effort, you increase the hypochondriac and torturing force of melancholy ideas by physical means, the evil result of which you have long realized, and which, out of love for me, you had given up for a time and had found yourself much better. May the

<sup>1</sup> Goethe sent her a present of coffee from Italy, and with reference to it, subsequently wrote (Feb. 2, 1787): "Wie leid ist mir's dass du von dem Kaffee zu viel weggegeben, wie lieb dass er dir wohl schmeckt; wenn er nur auch wohl bekommt. Man kann mehr verschreiben."

treatment and the change do you much good. I do not quite give up the hope that you will come to understand me again. Fritz is happy and visits me constantly. The Prince is lively and cheerful.”<sup>1</sup>

A week later (June 8) he wrote another letter to her—the last of the long succession which commemorates the passionate bond which had so long united them. “There could hardly be a more painful letter for me to write than the last I wrote you, and it was probably as unpleasant for you to read as for me to write. Nevertheless, our lips are at least opened, and I would wish that we may never close them to each other again. I have known no greater happiness than my confidence in you, which was always boundless; so soon as I can no longer exercise it, I am another man, and must change still more in the future. I do not complain of my present position; I have settled in completely, and hope to stand it, although the climate is once more assailing me and sooner or later will unfit me for much that is good. . . . In my own defence I will say nothing. Only I would like to make this request of you: do help me so that the relation which is so objectionable to you may not deteriorate but remain as it is.”<sup>2</sup> Give me your confidence again; look at the matter from a natural point of view; permit me to say a calm true word to you about it, and I can then hope that everything will be cleared up again between us. You have seen my mother,<sup>3</sup> and your visit gave her much pleasure. . . . Let your return be friendly to me also.”

Frau von Stein did not meet him in a friendly spirit on her return; she declined to share his affections with his Klärchen,<sup>4</sup> as she called Christiane

<sup>1</sup> On the MS. of this letter Frau von Stein wrote “Oh!!!”

<sup>2</sup> We recall Shelley's letter to his wife Harriet Westbrook, when he had eloped with Mary Godwin, in which he invited Harriet to join them.

<sup>3</sup> Frau von Stein visited Goethe's mother on her journey to Ems, and their meeting seems to have given mutual pleasure.

<sup>4</sup> The mistress of Egmont.



Vulpius, and thenceforward they met as strangers. Our sympathy naturally goes with the woman in the painful story. It was he who had originally sought her, and with a self-abandonment that brought its own nemesis. His sudden departure to Italy without communicating his intention to her who had been the confidant of all his soul's secrets, was an action which she could not forgive and naturally construed as a clear proof that their past relations were at an end. By his own testimony the line he took on his return to Weimar was neither tactful nor considerate. Had he been really desirous of renewing their former relations, he would at least have made the attempt to enter into her experience during the two years of his absence. On the contrary, by his own admission, he wearied her, as he wearied others, by his continual talk of Italy—a trial to an ordinary listener, but for her an indirect reminder that their former tie was broken. His proposal that she should share his interests with a woman of the stamp of Christiane Vulpius can only be regarded as an outrage on womanly feeling, and shows either a natural defect of perception or a temporary deflection of moral instincts consequent on his Roman experience.

Of Frau von Stein it may be said that she paid the penalty of her own indiscretion. Eight years older than Goethe when their intimacy began, she was also a woman of the world, a wife and the mother of a family, and worldly good sense might have counselled her as to the imprudence of a relation which could not run a natural course. She intermittently endeavoured to restrain the ardour of her youthful devotee, but, flattered by his worship of her, she came under a spell of which the circumstances of their breach were the painful revelation. The world justifies her in declining Goethe's singular proposal for their future relations, but her conduct after their quarrel shows that she was not the "perfect woman, nobly planned" Goethe's adoration represents her.

A characterization of her by one of her sons, Carl, shows her in a somewhat different light from the halo in which she is enveloped in Goethe's letters and verses addressed to her. Writing to his brother Fritz, he says: "I find that our mother, when she argues about anything, not only never yields a point, but also by accusations, reproaches, and remarks which have nothing to do with the matter, knows how to put her adversaries out of countenance." And again he says: "I am cautious about entering into a dispute with her because she never discusses, but at once becomes aggressive." It was precisely these characteristics which she displayed in her breach with Goethe. A dignified self-restraint and silence would have been the severest form of rebuke she could have administered to him, but she chose the course of bitter reproach to himself and malevolent remarks behind his back. It would appear, however, that she had visitations of better feeling, and that she fully realized all she had lost in her final severance from one who for so many years was the main interest of her life. "I feel," she is reported to have said on one occasion, "as if a beautiful star had fallen from heaven."

Frau von Stein now passes completely out of Goethe's life, for the few subsequent communications between them were of a purely formal character. The new relation into which Goethe entered is one of those equivocal incidents in the biographies of great men which perplex their warmest admirers. In November, 1789, he installed Christiane Vulpius in his household and on Christmas Day she bore him a son, Julius August Walther—an event which probably determined his making her his housemate. As the boy had the Duke for his godfather, and Herder, the ecclesiastical Superintendent of the Duchy, baptized him, he was ushered into the world under sufficiently respectable auspices.<sup>1</sup> Goethe

<sup>1</sup> Christiane bore him three other children, of whom one died in infancy, and two were stillborn.

from youth onwards delighted in the company of children who found him the most interesting of play-mates, and it was doubtless the presence of the boy that cemented between him and Christiane a bond which was to endure for twenty-seven years.

That after the first burst of passion he continued to regard her with genuine affection, his conduct to her leaves us in no doubt. A companion in any high sense, indeed, she could not be, considering her antecedents and her attainments. In Weimar she was spoken of as his "cook" or his "maid," and, in point of fact, her chief function in Goethe's household was that of housekeeper. And she was herself perfectly aware of the position she occupied. She had no control of the household expenses, she waited at table, and her attitude to Goethe and his friends was that of a dependant. His letters to her during his long absences from Weimar show warm affection, but at the same time clearly imply the footing in which they stood to each other. Such expressions as the following could hardly have been addressed to a woman with whom he felt himself on equal terms. "Arrange everything properly, and prepare yourself for becoming a dear little cook." "Be a real domestic treasure, and prepare a nice home for me." Christiane had a weakness for dress, and he humoured it by sending her articles of attire in which she took a childish delight. In the relations in which they stood to each other there was the risk that she might weary of her position and of surroundings which could hardly have been congenial to a young and pretty woman with the preferences of Christiane. More than once, during his long absences from her, he gently reminds her that she must not let her affections wander. "Go on loving me," he writes to her, "for I am often jealous in thought, and imagine that you might like some one better." . . . "If I wrote anything which could give you pain, you must forgive me. Your love is so precious to me, that I would be very unhappy to lose it; you



must pardon me for a little jealousy and anxiety." As the years passed, Christiane gradually settled down in her unnatural situation, but her life was a long sacrifice which excites our warmest sympathy. Naturally cheerful and affectionate, she was debarred from all society in which she could have found herself at home. Such friends as Goethe entertained she could not meet on equal terms; for the ladies of Weimar she was a jest, and with the exception of her sister and an aunt, domiciled in the back part of the house with Goethe's permission, she does not appear to have had a single female acquaintance. "Except yourself and the *Geheimrat*," she wrote at a later time to a friend in Bremen, "I have not a friend in the world." And her feelings for Goethe were mixed with an awe which made impossible the full effusion of the heart. Though he constantly treated her with considerate kindness, she was never allowed to forget her position. When on one occasion she ventured on some liberty, he wrote these significant words: "It is my wish; you know that I do not like to lay down the law." It was, in truth, the unhappy result of the unequal yoke that it involved the misdirection of a woman's life and the sacrifice of her natural instincts.

We naturally ask why Goethe entered into a connection which contemporaries and posterity have agreed in condemning. We find the answer in a deep-rooted instinct which had more than once manifested itself in his past life—his dread of the bond which the marriage-tie involves.<sup>1</sup> He had fled from Friederike Brion to elude the natural conclusion of their mutual passion, and his breach with Lili Schönemann was really due to his shrinking from the marriage-bond. "I would be a fool to allow myself to be shackled," he makes one of his characters say, "That state [marriage] smothers all my powers; that state robs me of all my spirits, cramps my whole being." Such being Goethe's attitude to marriage, he was not

<sup>1</sup> Swift, it may be recalled, had the same repugnance.

likely to be deterred from an unconventional connection by regard for public opinion. All through life he seems to have acted on the conviction that, when the accepted laws of society conflicted with his own free development, it was his interest to disregard them.<sup>1</sup> Goethe's connection with Christiane was severely judged by the Weimar Court, though it had condoned his *liaison* with Frau von Stein—a graver offence, we may think, against the interests of the social bond. It, also, made his friends unhappy; Knebel disapproved of it; Herder expressed himself as more “displeased” than “surprised” at the step; and Schiller, not yet on intimate terms with Goethe, spoke of his “wretched household relations.” On the other hand, the Duke, who was engaged at the time in an amour of his own (of which Goethe disapproved), showed by his acting as godfather to the child of the illicit union that he was not greatly shocked. What is curious, also, is that the Duchess Luise, distinguished by delicate feeling and regardful of social conventions, displayed a consideration for Christiane in marked contrast to the general attitude of the Court ladies. Finally, Goethe's mother, whose piety mainly consisted in an easy trust in Providence, and whose idolatry of her son hardly permitted any criticism of his action, opened her heart to his companion in life and, on the occasion of their meeting, gave her a mother's welcome.

It was not till 1806, eighteen years after he met Christiane, that Goethe sealed their connection by legal marriage. That, hating as he did all restraints on his freedom of action, he maintained his relation with Christiane for so lengthened a period shows that in his own opinion its advantages outweighed its inconveniences. We have it from himself that his domestic arrangements were such as gave him the freedom and repose he needed to carry on his various tasks. “Pleasant household relations,” he wrote in

<sup>1</sup> Yet, in his later years at least, he called marriage a great “victory for civilization,” and held that it was a necessary bond of society.

the second year of Christiane's abode with him, "give me the courage and the mood to elaborate my *Roman Elegies* and put them into proper shape." In spite of her lack of education, Christiane, at least in her earlier years, had attractions of her own as a housemate. Her luxuriant beauties, to which Goethe was so susceptible, her ways of thinking, unsophisticated by letters, and her good humour and kindness of heart, pleased others besides Goethe himself. Moreover, that she was not lacking in good sense and mother wit is shown by the fact that he occasionally read his verses to her—perhaps for the same reason as Molière read his plays to his housekeeper; and that he directly addressed to her his two poems—*The Metamorphosis of Plants*, and *The Metamorphosis of Animals*—in which he expounds his conceptions of the processes of nature. But, if Goethe convinced himself that his domiciliary arrangement with Christiane Vulpius was advantageous to himself and his powers of production, it has materially affected his influence with posterity. "The nation," says one of his German biographers, "has never forgiven its greatest poet for this rupture with law and custom; nothing has stood so much in the way of a right appreciation of his moral character; nothing has created more false judgments on the tendency of writings than his half-marriage."

We have seen how bitterly Goethe felt the cold response of Frau von Stein and his other friends in Weimar when he spoke to them of his Italian memories. Driven in upon himself, he found solace in living over again the experience of a world in which he had renewed the zest of youth. He toiled at *Tasso*, which he completed in the summer of 1789. But, though *Tasso* recalled Italy and classical things, it was a task that evoked mingled feelings. Begun under the sunshine of Frau von Stein's sympathy, it was finished under the cloud of mutual estrangement. He found a purer enjoyment in contributing to Wieland's journal, the *Mercur*, some



papers relating to his Italian journey which he subsequently embodied in the *Italienische Reise*. But it was in another work, the *Roman Elegies*, that he found full expression for all that he had seen and thought and felt during his residence in Italy.

The plan of the *Roman Elegies* may have occurred to him during his second residence in Rome, but there is conclusive proof that they were written during the years 1788-9 after his return from Italy.<sup>1</sup> As the unique expression of a temporary phase of his development, these *Elegies* have a notable place in the long and varied list of his works. At a certain period of his life, Goethe had been Christian after a fashion of his own; but, as classical antiquity more and more attracted him, the teaching of historical Christianity became more and more distasteful to him. His change of attitude had progressed during his first period in Weimar, and the conversion was completed in Italy. From Italy he returned a full-blooded Pagan—a designation which he chose to give himself. He frankly told his friends that he was now of the school of Lucretius, and he has a reference to the Founder of Christianity in remarkable contrast to the terms in which he came to speak of Him in the last years of his life. In *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* he had aimed at reproducing classical forms of art; in the *Roman Elegies* his aim was not only to reproduce classical forms, but to express the Pagan spirit in its entire attitude to life.

It is in their respective conceptions of love that the Pagan and the Christian ideals present their most striking contrast. In choosing love as the theme of his *Elegies*, therefore, Goethe had the opportunity and the scope for giving the fullest expression to the soul of classical antiquity as he conceived it. The models he followed were the Roman elegiac poets,

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to his publisher Göschen, Goethe says that they were written in Rome, and he actually dates them from Rome; but it is probable that he did so to prevent the association of the *Elegies* with Christiane Vulpius.

Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius. The *Elegies*, twenty in number and written in alternating hexameters and pentameters, have no regular development, each having been thrown off as its theme occurred to him. As he depicts himself in the series, he is at once lover and artist—at times distracted between the claims of love and art. Now he is concerned at the loss of time his love occasions, but his dominant feeling is that the lover and the artist are compact and that the one is the complement of the other. The majority of the *Elegies* chant the delights of his love and its surreptitious enjoyment which only quickens its zest, while others express the rapture of the poet in the world which he conjures up. The object of his passion figures under the name of Faustima, of whom we learn that she is a widow in poor circumstances from which he has relieved her, and that she has an uncle who disapproved of their relations.<sup>1</sup> There are indications, however, that Christiane Vulpius was in his mind, as in the lines in the fourth *Elegy* where he describes the personal appearance of his love which corresponds with that of Christiane; and we have seen that Goethe himself says that she gave him the courage and the mood to give his mind to the *Elegies*. The world in which all the poems move is Rome as Goethe saw it, but he sees it through the eyes of the Roman poets whom he was imitating.

Two of the best known passages in the *Elegies* will illustrate the nature of the feeling that inspired him in the treatment of their two main themes—love and art. In the following lines we are reminded of the “godlike insolence” (his own phrase) with which Goethe in his youth had defied public opinion.

Oftmals hab' ich auch schon in ihren Armen gedichtet,  
 Und des Hexameters Mass leise mit fingernder Hand  
 Ihr auf dem Rücken gezählt. Sie atmet in lieblichem  
 Schlummer,

<sup>1</sup> During his second residence in Rome he had a real *liaison* with this Faustima.

Und es durchglüheth ihr Hauch mir bis ins Tiefste die Brust.

Amor schütret die Lamp indess und denket der Zeiten,  
Da er den nämlichen Dienst seinen Triumvirn gethan.

In the following passage (the entire seventh *Elegy*) we have the whole Goethe as Rome had made him, intoxicated with his dream of the ancient world.

O wie fühl' ich in Rom mich so froh! gedenk' ich der Zeiten,

Da mich ein graulicher Tag hinten im Norden umfing,  
Trübe der Himmel und schwer auf meinen Scheitel sich senkte,

Farb- und gestaltlos die Welt um den Ermatteten lag,  
Und ich über mein Ich, des unbefriedigten Geistes

Düstre Wege zu spähn, still in Betrachtung versank.

Nun umleuchtet der Glanz des helleren Aethers die Stirne;  
Phöbus rufet, der Gott, Formen und Farben hervor.

Sternhell glänzet die Nacht, sie klingt von weichen Gesängen  
Und mir leuchtet der Mond heller als nordischer Tag.

Welche Seligkeit ward mir Sterblichen! Träum' ich?  
Empfänget

Dein ambrosisches Haus, Jupiter Vater, den Gast?

Ach! hier lieg' ich und strecke nach deinen Knieen die Hände

Flehend aus. O vernimm, Jupiter Xenius, mich!

Wie ich hereingekommen, ich kann's nicht sagen; es fasste

Hebe den Wandrer und zog mich in die Hallen heran,

Hast du ihr einen Heroen herauf zu führen geboten?

Irrte die Schöne? Vergieb! Lass mir des Irrthums Gewinn!

Deine Tochter Fortuna, sie auch! Die herrlichsten Gaben

Theilt als ein Mädchen sie aus, wie es die Laune gebeut.

Bist du der wirtliche Gott? O dann, so verstosse den Gastfreund

Nicht von deinem Olymp wieder zur Erde hinab!

"Dichter! wohin versteigest du dich?" Vergieb mir! der hohe

Kapitolinische Berg ist dir ein zweiter Olymp.

Dulde mich, Jupiter, hier, und Hermes führe mich später,

Cestius' Mal vorbei, leise zum Orcus hinab.

No work of Goethe has in its kind received more unqualified admiration than his *Roman Elegies*. From their nature, indeed, they were bound to evoke conflicting opinions. Weimar and the general public



of Germany were scandalized at what was considered their wanton libertinism, and Herder, not a squeamish moralist, dissuaded Goethe from their publication.<sup>1</sup> Even the Duke, who showed no great regard for the proprieties in his own conduct, found them objectionable; when, in 1795, they appeared in Schiller's journal, *Die Horen*, he told Schiller that their publication was a freak, unbecoming leaders in literature. On the other hand, Schiller himself found nothing to reprove in them on the score of morality; they might offend conventional decency, he said, but not a decency founded on truth and nature. The supreme distinction which Schiller saw in the *Roman Elegies* is precisely that which has evoked the admiration of succeeding critics—the completeness with which the poet has identified himself with the world he creates. In the case of *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* we have the feeling of a certain pose, of a self-conscious intention; in the *Elegies* spontaneity and self-abandonment are the most striking characteristics. Man, according to Schiller, is never his entire self except when he is at play, and it is in the spirit of a game that Goethe gave himself to the inditing of the *Elegies*. "If it pleases Amor," he wrote to von Knebel, "I will regale you at our next meeting with some *jeux d'esprit* in the more antique style. I cannot get away from this *genre*, though my paganism at once transports me into wonderful situations." Once more, though under a different inspiration, Goethe has in these poems found the full and free utterance of his earlier work, and has "regaled" the modern world as it has never been regaled before or since.

Yet the question has been raised by his own countrymen: Are these brilliant *pastiches*, which the *Roman Elegies* really are, in the true line of the development of Goethe's genius? At best, it is said, despite their resplendent quality, they must be regarded as *tours de force*; "the inner, the real

<sup>1</sup> Four, or according to another authority two, of the *Elegies* remained in manuscript, as their nature forbade publication.

Goethe, is not in them." In his songs to Friederike Brion and to Lili Schöнемann and in his ballads we have Goethe speaking from and to his own time and nation ; in the *Roman Elegies* he is speaking out of an artificial world whence there can be no direct appeal to the soul of another time and place. It should be added that both Goethe and Schiller, the latter as passionate an admirer of the ancients as the former, came to have a sense that their striving after an art which was the product of conditions that cannot again be realized, was doomed to futility. In lines addressed to Goethe, Schiller, as Russell Lowell has pointed out, has unconsciously touched the weak point of their common striving.

Doch leicht gezimmert nur ist Thespis Wagen ;  
 Und er ist gleich dem acherontschen Kahn ;  
 Nur Schatten und Idole kann er tragen,  
 Und drängt das rohe Leben sich heran,  
 So droht das leichte Fahrzeug umzuschlagen,  
 Das nur die flüchtgen Geister fassen kann ;  
 Der Schein soll nie die Wirklichkeit erreichen,  
 Und siegt Natur, so muss die Kunst entweichen.

In what has been said of Goethe's mental condition during the two years succeeding his return from Italy it is his own testimony that has been followed, and it may be interesting to see the impression he made on his friends after the transformation which Italy had wrought in him. In a series of letters addressed to her husband, then in Italy, Frau Herder makes occasional references to Goethe which give the successive impressions he made on her. "He [Goethe] is almost like a chameleon ;<sup>1</sup> sometimes I quite like him, sometimes only half. He is never perfectly frank, and he carefully avoids every expression from which conclusions could be drawn ; that, I believe, is why he changes the subject so often." To the same purport she wrote : "His whole nature is still an enigma for me ; I don't know how to make him out." On the whole, however, her

<sup>1</sup> Goethe more than once applies this expression to himself.

estimate of him was favourable. "Goethe," she told her husband, "is through and through a genuine manly soul," and, she adds, none was more worthy of his affection. Finally, she flatters herself that at length she understands him. "About Goethe," she now wrote, "I have really made a great discovery. After all, *as a poet he lives with the Universal* (or rather *the Universal lives in him*) and so we as mere individuals must not ask more of him than he can give. He feels himself a being of a higher order, no doubt, but with it all he is the best and most constant of men."

From another friend of Goethe, von Knebel, in whom before his departure for Italy he had found an intelligent sympathizer in his literary and scientific undertakings, we have a characterization of him which is a striking commentary on the change that had been wrought on him by his Italian experiences. It was a special grief to Goethe that von Knebel, like others in the Weimar circle, gave only a cold response to the new opinions on art and life which now dominated him, and in a letter to Herder, written in the November following Goethe's return, von Knebel explains the reason of his coldness. "Goethe," he wrote, "is indeed incapable of admitting any other view but his own, or he converts that other view into his. . . . Art has completely taken hold of him; he regards it as the goal of all human improvement. I can understand this conception if sensuous blossoms are recognized as the highest expression of the essence of humanity. He is born and formed by nature to be an artist, and nothing but art can give him further nutriment."

But the most interesting characterization of Goethe at this period of his life is from the hand of one with whom he was subsequently to form one of the most memorable intellectual associations in literary history. It was in the years 1788-9 that Schiller first made Goethe's acquaintance, and in various letters to his friends he reports his impression



of him. Thus, in a letter to Körner, the father of the poet, dated September 7, 1788, he describes Goethe as follows: "He is of middle height, carries himself stiffly, and also walks stiffly;<sup>1</sup> his mien is reserved, but his eye is exceedingly expressive and animated, and one hangs with pleasure on his look. With much seriousness his air has nevertheless much kindness and benevolence. His complexion is dark, and he seemed to me to look older than he can well be according to my reckoning. His voice is very agreeable, and his talk is flowing, racy, and vivacious; one listens to him with very great pleasure; and, when he is in good humour, which was pretty much the case on this occasion, he enters into conversation willingly and with interest. . . . On the whole, my idea of him, which, indeed, was high before, is not lowered by this personal acquaintance; but I doubt if we shall become very intimate." Writing some months later (February, 1789) to another correspondent, Schiller again notes the marked reserve which characterized Goethe's general bearing. "I might in confidence give you my judgment on Goethe," he wrote, "but I might very easily exaggerate, as I have seen him extremely seldom, and I can only confine myself to the general impression his conduct makes on me. So far as I know, see, and have heard, with no one has Goethe ever come to a free communication of himself. Owing to his intellect and a thousand kind actions he has friends, worshippers, and idolaters, but he has ever kept himself to himself, has never given himself away. I fear that out of the intense enjoyment of self-love he has formed an ideal of happiness with which he is not happy. This character does not please me: I would not wish it for myself, I should not feel happy in contact with such a man." At the close of this letter Schiller adds a significant parenthesis which was to receive a remarkable

<sup>1</sup> Other observers note the marked stiffness of Goethe's walk and general bearing.

commentary in his future relations with Goethe. "Pay no regard to this judgment," he adds, "possibly the future may reveal him to us, or, still better, should it contradict the judgment." This was what, in Schiller's case at least, the future was to effect.

END OF VOL. I.







76280

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 692 745 3



